THE HOBO'S HORNBOOK

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THE HOBO'S HORNBOOK

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THE HOBO'S HORNBOOK

A Repertory for a Gutter Jongleur

COLLECTED AND ANNOTATED BY

GEORGE MILBURN

DECORATIONS BY

WILLIAM SIEGEL

IVES WASHBURN

NEW YORK MCMXXX

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To

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POESY IN THE JUNGLES

Tramps and hoboes are the last of the ballad makers. Not in the Tennessee hills, or among the Sea Island Negroes, or in any other such arrested community is there a more vigorous balladry than that which has been flourishing for the past fifty years in America's peripatetic underworld.

A number of sociologists and anthropologists have made extended studies of homeless men as social phenomena, and some attention has been given incidentally to their songs, but not many investigators in the field have attained to enough familiarity with the road to differentiate between genuine hobo ballads and the pseudo ballads offered by co-ed ukelele virtuosos and catarrhal phonograph yodellers.

Here the term "hobo" is used to define the songs and poems originated by American vagrants and current among them. To be strictly accurate, a distinction should be drawn between tramp and hobo ballads. Hoboes are migratory workers, while tramps have sources of livelihood other than toil. The tramp ballad is seldom familiar to any but initiates. Except for his preshun, or apprentice, whom he trains, the tramp does not seek society or put out any information about himself. For this reason his songs seldom pass into general

circulation. The hobo song, on the contrary, is often composed in the hope that it will have wide dissemination, especially when it is designed as a protest against the existing social order.

Denied the usual diversions of the modern world, both tramps and hoboes have turned to devices that flourished centuries ago. To relieve the tedium of dreary waits in jungle camps and long spells of incarceration in country jails, they have revived games that once flourished around the wassail bowl. Perhaps the most popular of these, distinctly medieval in character, is the kangaroo court. Before this mock tribunal one unfortunate after another is brought and baited. For some such trivial offence as an indiscreet smile or a wise crack the culprit may be beaten into insensibility. Ballad singing and recitation constitute a more humane but quite as archaic a hobo amusement. A gallon of whiteline can turn a jungle camp into a very convivial assembly, and on occasion, many extemporaneous epics, as well as the hobo classics, are sung or recited.

Extemporaneous rhyming was a favourite form of parlour entertainment in Georgian England. Theodore Hook and his coevals achieved fame as experts who could make rhymes as well as puns on any proper name. Nowadays such doings may seem tame to the home-guards, but in the jungles an aptitude for impromptu jingles makes up for many deficiencies. The lowest greasetail, if he has dithyrambic talents, may count on

an enthusiastic welcome at the mulligan pot. This extempore composition is not the difficult business it may appear at first blush. The lamentable paucity of rhymes in English is circumvented by the large fund of monikas, or nicknames, from which the singer may select. When he needs a rhyme he has only to work one of these into his song. He tries to mention at least, if not to celebrate, the monikas of all those present. If he fails the slighted members of his audience are likely to take offence and the entertainment may end in a battle royal.

As aids to the landloping Homer there are several skeleton ballads that come handy. On such a framework he ingeniously arranges the monikas of all the tramps he has ever known or heard about. An old favourite for this purpose is the song "Monikas Seen on the Water Tank," as are the several ballads having hobo convention themes. With their interminable rosters of delegates, these allow for the unreeling of many monikas, and the entertainer who wishes to dish out plenty of that age-old pap to vanity, personal mention, finds them easily adaptable.

The tramp mode of ballad presentation differs somewhat from that of the hobo. At the tramp gathering the entertaining is often left to the preshuns, or apprentice tramps. The jocker trains a young boy in the arts and sciences of trampdom, and in payment for his tuition the kid must serve as bread-winner (by thieving and begging) and aide-de-camp. Singing and reciting are

extra accomplishments. Every well-trained preshun has a wide repertory of ballads.

The jocker disciplines his apprentice by "putting the bug on him," which, in the lingo, means blistering him with cantharides or burning him with acid. These burns are utilized in begging. The relationship between the jocker and his kid is not dissimilar to that which once existed between the knight and his squire. In return for the guaranteed protection of the older and stronger, the novice gives absolute fealty. In the jungle camp he is not permitted to speak until spoken to, but when the jocker signs him to do so, he begins his song.

The tramp song that makes the closest approach to epic proportions is the one that the jocker sings to justify himself before his fellows and the other tramp kids for his exploitation of his own preshun. The song sometimes tells of the hardships the jocker has to undergo in protecting and training his kid. At other times a mythical jocker, whose kid has been taken from him by the dicks, is the hero of the song. It tells of the Odyssean exploits of the jocker in following the detectives back across the continent and his ultimate reunion with his faithful kid.

Hobo poesy is never concerned with love, and the sentimental tramp ballad, known to the barroom and the vaudeville stage, is not heard in the jungles.

The songs, for the most part, narrate the feats and adventures common to the vagrant life. Hoboes do not

have much truck with beauty, but in spite of that sad fact there are occasional fine strains of imagery running through their songs. The loveliness is all the more poignant for its crude setting. Examples are to be found in such pieces as "The Gila Monster Route," "The Wabash Cannonball," and "The Big Rock Candy Mountains."

Nor are hobo songs lacking in humour. The difficulty is that the humorous songs, more than any others, are likely to pass over into popular circulation and become perverted. Many so-called bum songs, written for phonograph recording and vaudeville, have precisely the same relation to hobo balladry that "Ole Man River" has to genuine Negro folk-songs.

"The Dying Hobo" is an example of a ballad that has been transformed for popular purposes. The parody is of indubitable hobo origin, but it has been memorized by high-school boys so long and it has been set to such a catchy collegiate tune, that its flavour has been impaired. It is impossible to say where the original version leaves off and the spurious cleverness sets in.

"The Dying Hobo" is a parody on a sentimental, one-time elocutionists' favourite, "Bingen on the Rhine." It is not uncommon to find a popular poem thus made over into a hobo ballad. Among literate tramps selections from Kipling are widely parodized. Several of these are included in the present collection. The most ingenious of these hobo parodists was an I. W. W. who signed himself Joe Hill. He confined himself largely to

burlesquing the hymns he had heard played by Salvation Army bands. All of Hill's parodies, together with other hobo songs, are printed annually in the I. W. W. pocket-size song book, now in its twenty-fourth edition.

Meanwhile, the folk-lorists, busied with mountaineers, Negroes, and cowboys, have made but scant attempt to catch and embalm specimens of the American vagrant's balladry. No investigator to date has succeeded in corralling any appreciable number of hobo songs for his collection. Dr. Louise Pound, of the University of Nebraska, took no notice of them in her pioneering study of American balladry, and John A. Lomax found only one. Carl Sandburg's *American Songbag*, perhaps the most comprehensive collection of American folk-songs yet published, includes a slim section of four. Nels Anderson, who made a sociological investigation of the hobo, points out the importance of tramp songs, and devotes a chapter of his book, *The Hobo*, to some of the less obscure ones.

Many of the ballads included in the present collection are solely from oral sources. The idea that hoboes, as a class, were imbued with the spirit of the medieval troubadours first occurred to me in 1926 when I was living on the outskirts of Chicago's hobohemia. A short distance away was Washington Square, known to staid Southsiders and suburbanites as "Nut Square" and to hoboes the nation over as "Bughouse Square." In that

oasis speech is free and the hoboes make the most of it. There it was that I found my first hobo elocutionists. A short time later I found occasion to take to the road, and when a year later—Thanksgiving Day, 1927—I rode into New Orleans on the blinds of an Illinois Central passenger my notebooks were bulging.

The following collection is not a result of the folklorist's scientific approach, and of course it is not definitive. As I have pointed out, hobo ballads are elusive, and running the last of them to ground must tax the patience of a far more vigorous amanuensis.

Several things contribute to this elusiveness of tramp songs. For one, the impromptu nature of many of them does not allow for any permanent versions. The songs are as variable as the audiences that hear them. A second discouraging feature is that a complete ballad is seldom in the memory of one man. It is necessary to follow long trails before fragments can be pieced together. Singers who have wide repertories of barrelhouse recitations and bullpen ballads have also, at times, an amazing lack of recollection. Dictation does not move them in the way that entertaining does, and away from the jungle fire their versions are likely to be confused and incomplete. Again, in any published versions, there must always remain wide gaps. A large number of the songs are so gloriously skatological that they defy reduction to type.

It is hoped, however, that this book will direct sym-

pathetic attention to the oral literature of tramps and hoboes. Both tramps and hoboes are anachronisms bound for extinction. It does not take a particularly astute observer to see the imminent doom of the hoboes, the migratory workers. A presage of it is found in the Middle Western wheat harvest, for years the summer stomping ground of hobo hordes. As the harvest has become more mechanized the employment of hoboes has decreased, and for two years now, like the buffalo herds before them, the hoboes have failed to come through.

At the same time automobiles have made it possible for any college sophomore to bum the breadth of the continent. No especial determination or fortitude is required to qualify as a tramp nowadays, and presently the tramping fraternity, with all its lore, must break up before the influx of gay cats who have neither any respect for trampdom's traditions nor any desire to make tramping a lifetime vocation.

The surest evidence of this decay lies in the fact that few tramps make any distinction between the rods and the gunnels any more. The gunnels are heavy iron truss rods that run lengthwise beneath a freight or passenger car, and, on freights, are comparatively easy to ride. The rods, or, more correctly, *the* rod, is found only on four-wheel passenger trucks, and riding it is an achievement denied all but those who have thoroughly mas-

tered tramping. Between the cross-section and the axle of the oblong four-wheel truck is a slender rod, little more than a yard long, parallel to the partition and the axle. On this the tramp once fitted the groove of his ticket, a board as broad as a man's hand and about six inches long. Crowded in this small space on the forward truck (on the rear truck he must "punch the wind") the passenger stiff rides, a feat requiring skill and courage. Few tramps nowadays know how to locate the rods, much less dare ride them. Indeed, to rid themselves of the last gay cats, the builders of railroad coaches have now but to heed the dying admonition of Jay Gould's daughter:

". . . Father, fix the blinds so the bums can't ride.
If ride they must, let 'em ride the rod,
Let 'em put their trust in the hands of God."

This preface, in slightly altered form, together with several ballad versions from the following collection, first appeared as an article in *The American Mercury* under the title, "Poesy in the Jungles."

I drew from Ralph Chaplin's article in *The New Masses* in preparing the biographical note on Joe Hill.

I am deeply grateful to Nels Anderson, author

of *The Hobo,* who permitted me to examine his files of *The Hobo News,* and who contributed a ballad to this collection.

"The Honest Tramp" first appeared in J. Frank Dobie's *Texas and Southwestern Folk Lore;* "Nocturne in a Railway Yard" and "The Bindle Stiff's Revenge" in W. H. Fawcett's *Smokehouse Monthly,* and my thanks are due to the editors of these two publications.

Budd L. McKillips, who wrote "Nocturne in a Railroad Yard," included here, also contributed some valuable notes on "Hallelujah, Bum Again," clearing up that ballad's origin.

The Argus Book Shop, Inc., holder of the copyright on Harry Kemp's *The Spirit of Youth,* was kind enough to permit me to include the poem, "Away from Town."

Roy W. Ginter, of Oklahoma City, Dr. W. E. Zeuch, of Mena, Arkansas, J. E. Bradley, of Justin, Texas, Oliver LaFarge II, of New Orleans, Paul Dooley, of Chicago, Jack Fischer, of Amarillo, Texas, David Kaplan, Peter Molyneaux, Daniel Conway, of Auburn, New York, and E. J. (Curly) Thoes, all were generous both in suggesting and in submitting material for this collection.

I wish to express appreciation to the people who helped me with the musical arrangements. Harold M. Levy, of New Orleans, was untiring in correct-

ing the manuscript notations and he arranged several pieces. Vivien Milburn and Wayland Boles harmonized the pieces which bear their initials.

And it is especially to the 'boes, anonymous and otherwise, who contributed to the completeness of this collection that the compiler extends his grateful acknowledgments.

GEORGE MILBURN

The University of Oklahoma
January, 1930

I. MONIKA SONGS

A CONVENTION SONG

THERE are many hobo songs celebrating hobo conventions, and all of them are true to a type, the frame-work ballad, a device used by jungle minstrels to give personal mention to each member of the audience. Another example of this type is "Monikas Seen on the Water Tank." The introductory and concluding stanzas are stock, but the verses introducing monikas, or hobo nicknames, are rhymed extemporaneously. For this reason the convention song may run to great length. In the following version only two specimen monika stanzas are given.

Back in the Spring of '90,
  As everybody knows
Green Castle, Ia., was swamped
  By a gathering of 'boes.

They come from north, south, east and west,
  Everywhere you could mention,
And the reason they were there was,
  They held a big convention.

That sunny day, the twelfth of May,
  They collected in a mob,

Hoboes from Chi' and Kokomo
Clear down to Eagle Knob.

There was some 'boes I never seen
They come from far and near;
They all laid in and tanked-up ten
Big wagonloads of beer.

I put my peepers on them all,
And recognized a few,
And now if I remember them,
Here's their monikas for you:

There was Pete the Shive from Slapjack's dive,
And Wino Bill from Cal,
Parson-faced Ed and Wingey Red
And a 'bo named Sugan Al.

There was Boogie Sam and Biff 'n' Bam,
And a little punk from Q.
Hikes and Spikes and Old Ring-tail Sykes
And a Philly 'bo called Lou.

Back in the shade of the jungle's glade
We slopped up on that beer
Each 'bo throwed his guts while the other mutts
Laid back and lent an ear.

The night was getting started
When someone hear a clatter,

And the clowns from the town come swarming down
And maybe we didn't scatter.

Some flipped freights to other states,
And others stayed behind,
Some glommed the rod and hopped the tops
And others hit the blind.

Now here I am in Omaha,
A hungry, ring-tailed bum,
Tooting ringers for poke outs,
When what I want is slum.

Toot! Toot! there goes a highball now—
The rattler's under way;
They're reefers for New Orleans, ma'am,
I'm off again—good day!

THE HOBO CONVENTION AT PORTLAND

THIS, very likely, is the most recent hobo convention song. The gathering described took place in the summer of 1921, and came off successfully without any assistance from the Portland, Oregon, Chamber of Commerce. A delegate named George Liebst has been credited with the present song, but it follows closely earlier convention anthems, and its purpose, that of introducing monikas, is the same.

You have heard of big conventions,
And there's some that can't be beat,
But get this straight, there's none so great
As when the hoboes meet.

To Portland, Oregon, that year
They came from near and far;
On tops and blind where cinders whined
And hanging to the draw-bar.

Three hundred came from New York State,
Some came from Eagle Pass;
That afternoon, the third of June,
They gathered there en masse.

From Lone Star State came "Texas Slim"
And "Jack the Katydid,"
With "Lonesome Lou" from Kal-mazoo
Came "San Diego Kid."

And "Denver Dan" and "Boston Red"
Blew in with "Hell-Fire Jack,"
"Andy Lang" from longshore gang,
"Big Mack" from Mackinac.

I saw some 'bos I'd never met;
A 'bo called "New York Spike,"
"Con the Sneak," from Battle Creek,
And "Mississippi Ike."

Old "Joisey Bill," dressed like a dude,
Shook hands with "Frisco Fred,"
And "Half-breed Joe" from Mexico
Shot craps with "Eastport Ed."

"St. Looie Jim" and "Pittsburg Paul"
Fixed up a jungle stew,
While "Slip'ry Slim" and "Bashful Tim"
Croaked gumps for our menu.

Then "Jockey Kid" spilled out a song
Along with "Desp'rate Sam";
And "Paul the Shark" from Terror's Park
Clog-danced with "Alabam."

We gathered 'round the jungle fire,
The night was passing fast;
We'd all done time for every crime,
And talk was of the past.

All night we flopped around the fire
Until the morning sun;
Then from the town the cops came down—
We beat it on the run.

We scattered to the railroad yards,
And left the bulls behind;
Some hit the freights for other states,
And many rode the blind.

Well, here I am in Denver town,
A hungry, tired-out 'bo;
The flier's due, when she pulls through,
I'll grab her and I'll blow.

That's her—she's whistling for the block—
I'll make her on the fly;
It's number nine—Santa Fe line.
I'm off again—Good-bye!

HOBO OBITS

Death rides with the hobo. The man who will deck an express train in motion, swing himself under the flying trucks of a passenger coach, who can stand for hours on the ledge of the blinds that is slippery with sleet, who is accustomed to travelling in such a way that a false hold means horrible mangling, such a man grows familiar with death and can be ironic in the face of it. This touch is not lacking in the following fragment, used to introduce monikas.

By sudden blast at Sherman Hill there went young Bill,
the Yegg,
The same which took old Des Moines Lil upon a powder
keg.

Switch Engine Mike and Boiler Ned fell by a Mexican,
Wood alcohol was found in bed along with Curly Dan.

The Jersey Slasher went away along a knife-blade keen,
The slide at Oney Gap it was caught Early June Pea
Green.

A boiler out of water got in Maine High-Pressure Joe,
And swift did pass one Polka Dot by mule at Maniteau.

In Texas with the Forty Dead lies deep the Boston Bee,
Chicago Red and Sandhouse Pete blew up near Manistee.

The Gold-toothed Kid and Peg-leg Bill fell from a
trestle high,
They slept upon some rails until a Western train
came by.

Not one of these, you can see, as swift each passed with-
out,
Was called away by house-maid's knee, none perished
with the gout.

MONIKAS SEEN ON THE WATER TANK

THE first two stanzas and the end of the following ballad are more or less stereotyped, but the verses reciting hobo monikas are as variable as the audiences that hear them. The hobo singer subtly flatters the listeners by mentioning them in his impromptu rhymes, and the enumeration of monikas will keep a group interested for hours at a stretch.

Oh, we left the Coast a month ago,
  Eastbound for Chicago.
The head shack ditched us in a burg
  The other side of Fargo.

Says he, "And if you are a tramp,
  And not a bum or chronika,
Mooch on down to the water tank
  And there chalk up your monika."

I went down to the water tank,
  It was all marked up with chalk.
There was stiffs from every State
  From 'Frisco to New Yawk.

Your attention for a while
  One and all I'll thank
And I'll mention some monikas
  Seen on that water tank.

There was Houston Bahney, Big Mike Devanney,
  Denver Flip and Baltimore Tip,
Mush Fake Tom and Big Sim Long,
  Snow Bird and York Skew Hip.

There was Conchee Pete and Bucket Seat,
  Big Fish and The Nailer.
Goggles Blue and Button Shoe,
  Ogden Ike and Ned the Sailor.

There was Wisconsin Slim and Sunny Jim,
  Binney Frost and The Big Warhorse,
Boston Fish and the Wheeling Kid,
  Throw-Me-Out Dutch and Alton Butch.

There was Sammy Slop and Philly Hop,
  Measlie Mike the Jobber;
The Auctioneer and Bughouse O'Rear,
  And Obie Beck the robber.

There was Jimmy Keen and Seldom Seen,
  Happy Dan and Syracuse Stan,
Sweedy Stew and Dayton Q,
  And A No. 1 and Two.

There was Bugs Stein and Flickers O'Brien,
Pogies and Obies and The Cigaret,
Lunger Scott and The Canton Hot Shot,
And some 'boes I never met.

There was Hypo Gann and Lefty Moran,
Cincy Dutch and Old Pa Crutch,
Little Punk Klein and Pat O'Ryan
And a kid called Looieville Hutch.

There was K. C. Jack and Mobile Mac,
Spokane Slim and Biff 'n' Bim,
Wingey Ed and young Chi Red,
And also Porkey Tim.

There was Poison Face Sim and Toledo Slim,
And a highbrown boogie called Jap Tokey;
Old Shervoo and Kalamazoo
And a kid called Hokey Pokey.

There was Hijack Hix and Pa Tricks,
Broken Back and Pooch,
The Cally Speed Ball and Doc Hall,
Who never was known to mooch.

There was Wino Bill and Burly Hill,
Printer Ted and Painter Red,
Pete Shellaber and Dick the Stabber,
And a bo called Winnepeg Ed.

There was Costigan and Harrigan
And Billy Kid of Q,
And I guess there are a few
That flopped down this little old town
While waiting to chu-chu.

THE ORIGINAL CONVENTION SONG

So far as the unwritten history of trampdom relates, the first hobo convention was held about 1900. Frenchy Le Boeuf was a "dead one." After quitting the road he settled down in Montreal and a mob of his tramp friends dropped in on him one night. A song was written to commemorate the occasion, but, as in "Monikas Seen on the Water Tank," the verses purporting to be a rhymed roster of the delegates are variable. The three stanzas that seem to have come down unchanged are given below:

If you'll give me your attention,
Some facts to you I'll mention
About the bums' convention
That was held in Montreal.

Oh, each gunsil got directions
To go yegg a swag of sections
For the jockers in convention
In the hall at Montreal.

Chorus:
They were hikin' through the tunnels,
Holding on to funnels,
Riding on the gunnels,
On the way to Montreal.

II. THE LEHIGH VALLEY SEQUENCE

DOWN IN LEHIGH VALLEY

HERE is the logical grandparent of all sentimental hobo ballads. The hobo, having learned to strike a contrast between the sentiment and the reality of his existence, subjects "Lehigh Valley" to frequent burlesques.

Let me sit down a minute, stranger.
A stone got in my shoe—
Now don't commence your cussin'.
I ain't done nothing to you.

Yes, I'm a tramp—what of it?
Some says we ain't no good,
But tramps has to live, I reckon,
Tho' folks don't think we should.

Once I was young and handsome,
Had plenty of cash and clothes,
But that was before I tippled
And gin colored up my nose.

It was down in Lehigh Valley
Me and my people grew.
I was a blacksmith, captain;
Yes, and a good one, too.

Me and my wife and Nellie;
Nellie was just sixteen,
And she was the prettiest creature
The valley had ever seen.

Beaus—why she had a dozen—
Had 'em from near and fur,
But they was most of them farmers—
None of them suited her.

Then came a city stranger,
Young, handsome and tall,
Dang him, I wish I had him,
Strangled against that wall.

He was the man for Nellie,
She didn't know no ill;
Her mother tried to tell her,
But you know how a young girl will.

Well, it's the same old story;
Common enough, you'll say:
He was a smooth-tongued devil,
And he got her to run away.

It was less than a month later
That we heard from the poor young thing:
He had gone away and left her,
Without a wedding ring.

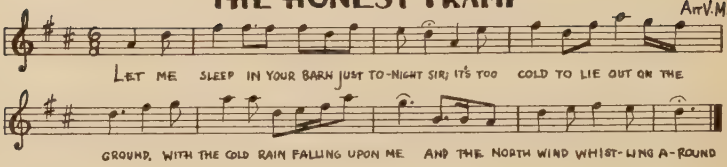
Back to our home we brought her,
  Back to her mother's side,
Filled with a raging fever,
  She fell at our feet and died.

Frantic with grief and trouble,
  Her mother began to sink.
Dead—in less than a fortnight—
  That's when I took to drink.

Give me a drink, bartender,
  And I'll be on my way.
I'll tramp till I find that scoundrel,
  If it takes till judgment day.

THE HONEST TRAMP

Arr V.M.


LET ME SLEEP IN YOUR BARN JUST TO-NIGHT SIR; IT'S TOO COLD TO LIE OUT ON THE
GROUND, WITH THE COLD RAIN FALLING UPON ME AND THE NORTH WIND WHIST-LING A-ROUND

THE HONEST TRAMP

THE story of the honest tramp is closely akin to "Down in Lehigh Valley" and other sentimental tramp narratives. The following version is not from the jungles. J. Frank Dobie notes it in his *Texas and Southwestern Folk Lore*.

Let me sleep in your barn tonight, mister;
It's too cold to lie out on the ground,
With the cold rain falling upon me
And the north wind whistling around.

You may see that I use no tobacco,
And I carry neither matches nor pipe.
I am sure that I will do you no harm, sir.
Let me sleep in your barn just tonight.

You ask me how long I've been tramping,
Or leading this kind of a life.
If you'll listen I'll tell you my story—
Though it cuts through my heart like a knife.

It was three years ago last summer—
I shall never forget that sad day—

When a stranger had come from the city,
So tall, so handsome, and gay.

He was tall, fine dressed, and looked sporty;
He looked like a man who had wealth,
And he said he had come to the country
To stay just awhile for his health.

My wife said she would like to be earning,
With something to add to our home;
She coaxed me until I consented
That the stranger would stop in and board.

And one night when I came home from my work, sir,
I was whistling and singing with joy,
Expecting a warm-hearted welcome
To receive from my wife and my boy.

Nothing did I find but a letter
That someone had placed on the stand,
And the moment my eyes fell upon it
I picked it up in my hand.

And the words that were wrote there upon it
Seemed to burn through my brain and drive me wild,
For they told me the stranger and Nellie
Had run off and taken my child.

Then I stopped at a farmhouse last summer;
  There they told me my baby had died;
It was there for the first time in my life, sir,
  I knelt to my knees and I cried.

Then they took me down to the churchyard;
  There they showed me a newly made mound,
And they told me that Nellie, my darling,
  Lay asleep in that cold, solid ground.

Now I'm sure there is a God up in heaven,
  Or, at least, I've been taught to believe;
I am sure He will keep on the record
  The doom that he ought to receive.

DOWN IN THE MOHAWK VALLEY

HERE is one of the innumerable parodies on that hobo classic, "Down in Lehigh Valley." It represents hobo humour at its best. The sentimental tramp ballad is frequently familiar to the "homeguards," but from the hobo elocutionists one is far more likely to hear some take-off on the original poem.

Let me sit down here, stranger, and don't look at me so
black,
I just got throwed off a freight-train, and now I'm
hoofin' back.
Yes, I'm a bum and I know it; I reckon they's more like
me,
But once I was young and handsome—as fair as you'll
ever see.

It was down in the Mohawk Valley where me and my
family grew,
And I ran the village gin mill and I made lots of jack, too.
Me and my wife and Nellie—Nellie was just sixteen—
And she was as a fair a crittur as mortal eyes ever seen.

Sweethearts? Say, she had a million that came from near
and far

Just to have her serve 'em a snort of gin o'er my black walnut bar;
She could have married a fortune and been free from every harm
If she'd wanted to marry a "homeguard" and live on a Valley farm.

But Nell was danged perticuler, and she turned 'em all away.
She had no likin' fer churnin' cream or the smell of new mown hay;
Nell wanted to be a lady, and live in a high-class town
And wash her hands in a finger-bowl and wear a low-cut gown.

And then along came a stranger, with handsome face and fair,
With an eye-brow on his upper lip and lard on his raven hair;
One of them smooth-talkin' devils that talks with his flashin' eyes—
And he pitchered his life in the city—stranger, they was all lies.

Well, Nellie's heart was a-flutter, and she fell for the man that day
And my heart melted like butter when we saw them on their way;

And Nell went into the city and the parson tied the knot
And she took a job in a beanery where they serve the hungry lot.

Well, it was the same old story; the man was a pizen snake,
And he spent every dime and jitney that little Nell could make,
And then one night he left her alone in the cold, wet rain,
Left her flat on her uppers and grabbed a east-bound train.

Well, Nell came home that autumn and brung her brindle pup,
And maw took sick a-thinkin' on how she had brought Nell up;
For Nell had the durndest notions ever spawned in human heads—
She made us buy new furniture and maw and me had twin beds.

She made maw have her hair cut and dresses to show her legs,
And she painted up maw's lips and cheeks so they looked like Easter eggs,

And I had to wear new-fangled pants that drug up dust
and dirt,
And a coat that showed my hip pockets and a trick
creton shirt.

And maw got to goin' to night clubs and we bought a
brand new car,
That made me put a mortgage on our home and on the
old gin bar;
And then things all went blooey and they throwed me
in the can,
And Nell jumped the coop with a barber and maw
'loped with a travelin' man.

And I got so durned light-hearted I didn't give a darn,
And I started drinkin' moonshine with the gang at the
livery barn;
So give me a drink, kind stranger, and I'll hit fer the
railroad track
Fer I want to git out of this country—the old woman
is comin' back!

DOWN IN LEHIGH VALLEY II

THE following parody on the pathetic recitation "Down in Lehigh Valley" is perhaps better known in the jungles than the original. The setting is in a small town public privy.

Don't move over, stranger;
I won't —— on your seat
Nor ——on the coat that's on yer back
Nor the shoes that's on yer feet.

Down in the Lehigh Valley,
Me and my pal, Bill,
Pimped three years for a callhouse
And the work was all uphill.

We had a girl named Nellie,
And she was some high flyer;
She had Bright's disease
And you couldn't satisfy 'er.

Along come a guy from the city
Handsome and smooth and rich,
And he stole away our Nellie;
The blue —— son of a ——!

Now, God be with you, stranger,
And I'll be on my way.
I'll hunt the runt that stole my ——
If it takes till Judgment Day.

THE BOSS TRAMP

THE reference to horse-cars in the following burlesque on "Down in Lehigh Valley" places the original's beginings at some time before the advent of electricity. With the exception of the pornographic parody, the following is the most brilliant item the Lehigh Valley school has produced.

Give me a corned beef sandwich,
  A horse-car run down my throat,
Or give me a whiskey straight,
  Or surely I will choke.

Once I was married and miserable,
  And had a loving wife,
And thought no more of spending a cent
  Than I did of taking my life.

'Way over in the wilds of Joisey,
  Where you'd sink in mud to yer knees,
I had a cross-eyed daughter,
  And she was just the cheese.

Mashes! why she had 'em by the barrel,
  Each one a pimple-faced hick.

But Nell, she didn't like 'em;
She said they made her sick.

Then along come a Bowery actor,
A regular free-lunch tank—
He claimed he was a song and dance man
With money in the bank.

Well, it's the same old gag,
And many a one has tripped;
He sent her to pawn my Sunday suit,
And then to the river skipped.

Now the poor gal never knowed much
And she had a terrible fall,
And when I got out of jail that day
She up and told me all.

I took her to my aching heart,
I smashed her in the smeller,
Then I drug the floor with her,
And throwed her in the cellar.

Now you can laugh and chew tobacco,
And say whatever you like,
But I'll tramp till I find that actor
If it takes till Saturday night.

THE BINDLE STIFF'S REVENGE

THE Lehigh Valley cycle waited many years for completion, and it is pleasant, indeed, to record that Nellie has been avenged at last. The work was finished off only recently by Harry Dawson, a bard who knows his hobo lingo. The theme has tempted hobo ballad makers for five decades, but the following poem leaves nothing to be said. It was clipped from the *Smokehouse Monthly*.

At a jungle fire by the railroad track
  Near the edge of a Kansas town
A hobo was boiling a bucket of slum
  As the evening sun went down.

The fragrant smell from the java can
  Made his nostrils quiver and twitch,
As a freight train rattled around the bend
  And came to a stop at the switch.

A moment's pause, then the train rolled on,
  But during the minute it stopped
Another hobo eased from the rods
  And down the embankment dropped.

His hat was greasy, his coat was torn
His pants were a total wreck,
And cinders clung to his grimy face
And coated his filthy neck.

"Ha! Friend of the road! Just in time,"
He croaked with a toothless smile,
"Hand over a shot of that good janoke,
For I've rambled many a mile."

The first bo cringed as he heard that voice
And his face went white as death
As he stumbled back from the jungle fire
With a sob and a catch in his breath.

The stranger noticed these actions strange
And peered through the gathering night
At a pair of eyes wide with fear
And a face aghast with fright.

"So at last it's come," he said with a sneer,
"I've hounded you down, you cur,
And you'll pay tonight for every wrong
That you ever did to her.

"These fifteen years reward me at last.
I knew that the day would come
When I'd see you grovel and cringe and whine
At my feet, you lousy bum.

" 'Twas you who ruint our little Nell
So that good folks passed her by.
I've hunted this wide world over since,
And tonight you're going to die.

"You led her away with your rotten lies,
Then, clothed in the mantle of shame,
You left her alone in the slums to die,
While you hunted other game.

"Your time has come and you'll never leave
The side of this fire alive!"
Then his hand flashed under his ragged coat
And out came a forty-five.

A muffled roar and a strangling cry,
Then the huddled form lay still
And the killer turned with a misty eye
And gazed at a distant hill.

Then up to the stars he raised his face
Aglow with a strange new light,
And murmured, "Nellie, the debt I owe
Is settled in full tonight."

III. PARODY AND BURLESQUE

THE BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAINS

THIS song provides some excellent samples of tramp fantasy. In many small cities and towns the children of poor whites use the railroad yards as their playgrounds. From these urchins the jockers sometimes recruit their road kids, and to entice them they tell them roseate tales of tramp life. These fabrications are known as "ghost stories." To homeguards "The Big Rock Candy Mountains" may appear a nonsense song, but to all pied pipers in on the know it is an amusing exaggeration of the ghost stories used in recruiting kids.

One sunny day in the month of May,
A jocker he come hiking;
He come to a tree, and "Ah!" says he,
"This is just to my liking!"

In the very same month on the very same day
A hoosier's son came hiking;
Said the bum to the son, "O, will you come
To the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

Chorus:

"I'll show you the bees,
And the cigarette trees,

And the soda-water fountains,
And the lemonade springs
Where the bluebird sings
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains."

So they started away on the very same day,
The bum and the kid together,
To romp and to rove in the cigarette grove
In the land of sunny weather.

They dreamed and hiked for many days,
The mile posts they were countin',
But they never arrived at the lemonade tide
And the Big Rock Candy Mountain.

The punk rolled up his big blue eyes,
And he said to the jocker, "Sandy,
I've hiked and hiked and counted ties,
But I ain't seen no candy.

"I've hiked and hiked till my feet 're sore,
I'll be God damned if I hike any more
To be a homeguard with a lemonade card
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains."

THE BOOMER SHACK

PROHIBITION made a profound impression on hobo *belles lettres,* and many such psuedo-pathetic ballads as the following are current in the jungles.

Eastbound Jack was a boomer shack,
And he loved the jungle pot,
His run went down from Yuma town,
Where the desert sands are hot.

Now listen here, you boomers near,
Even as you and I,
Jack had a thirst, in a land accursed—
Ye gods, but Jack was dry!

He was on a freight that was an hour late,
Heading for lager flow,
While she rambled along, Jack sang this song,
"Hurrah for Mexico!"

Now cometh, my lad, a verse that is sad,
Ah, mates, 'tis laden with woe,
For Eastbound Jack, the boomer shack,
Was barred from Mexico!

From a line drawn tight, both day and night,
Was a sign that barred his class;
And the poor mutt read, with heart of lead,
This legend: "You shall not pass!"

Then the sad shack pranced and woefully glanced
At the bright lights across the way,
They meant, without fear Pilsner beer
Was the brew on tap that day.

With a moan and a pine at the Pilsner sign,
Which poor Jack painfully read,
In his throat came a rasp, and a last dying gasp,
And he fell to the pavement—dead!

CHRISTMAS IN THE BIG HOUSE

THIS is a hobo parody on a more familiar humorous poem, " 'Twas Christmas in the Harem." The Big House, of course, is the tramp's affectionate term for penitentiary.

'Twas Christmas in the Big House,
All the convicts were gathered there
Seated round the table,
Waiting for their fare.

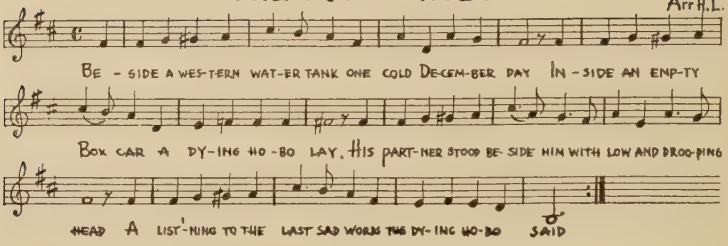
Enters then the warden,
And softly to them calls,
"What do you want for Christmas?"
And the convicts answered "Balls!"

Then angry was the warden,
And he swore by all the gods
That he'd give no Christmas pudding
To such ungrateful clods.

Then up rose an ancient convict
And in a voice as hard as brass
Said, "Take yer Christmas pudding
And shove it up yer ——!"

THE DYING HOBO

Arr H.L.


BE - SIDE A WES-TERN WAT-ER TANK ONE COLD DE-CEM-BER DAY IN - SIDE AN EMP-TY
BOX CAR A DY-ING HO-BO LAY. HIS PART-NER STOOD BE-SIDE HIM WITH LOW AND DROO-PING
HEAD A LIST-NING TO THE LAST SAD WORDS THE DY-ING HO-BO SAID

THE DYING HOBO

This hobo classic has filtered through to the workaday world, and it is now heard in young ladies' seminaries more often than it is sung in the jungles. A parody, modelled after that elocutionists' favourite, "A Soldier of the Legion, or Bingen on the Rhine," it furnishes an excellent sample of hobo irony. It has numerous variants, one of which, "The Hobo's Last Lament," is included in this collection. The first of the two musical arrangements given here is the hobo version, while the second, scored for two voices, is a collegiate variation.

Beside a western water tank
One cold December day,
Inside an open box-car
A dying hobo lay.

His partner stood beside him
With low and drooping head,
Listening to the last words
The dying hobo said:

"Good-bye, old pal, I'm going
To a land where all is bright;

Where the hand-outs grow on bushes
And you can sleep out every night.

"I'm going to a better land
Where brakies ain't so mean,
Where all the bulls is cripples,
And dogs is never seen.

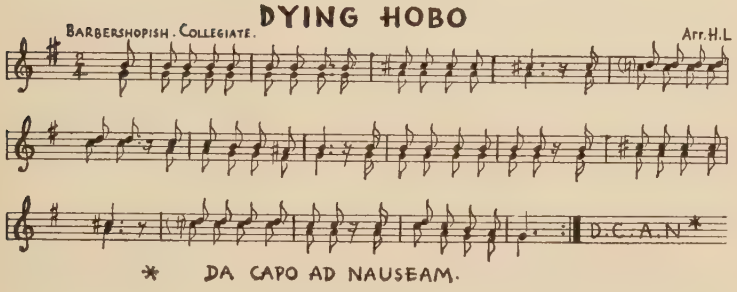
"There no one knows of rock piles—
You always have clean socks;
There little streams of whiskey
Come trickling down the rocks.

"Tell my old pal back in Denver,—
His monika is Leadville Lou—
That I snagged a hot shot freight,
And that I'm going through.

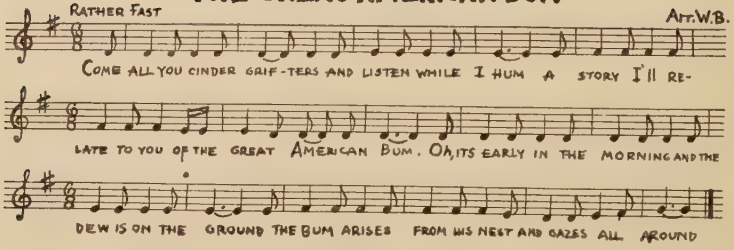
"Tell him not to wait on me,
No tears in his eyes must lurk,
'Cause I'm going to a happy land
Where they hate that word called work.

"Hark! I hear her whistle!
I must flip her on the fly!
Good-bye, old pal," he murmured,
"I'm not afraid to die."

His head fell back, his eyes grew dim;
He had sung his last refrain.
His partner swiped his coat and hat
And hopped an eastbound train.



THE GREAT AMERICAN BUM


RATHER FAST
ARR. W.B.
COME ALL YOU CINDER GRIF-TERS AND LISTEN WHILE I HUM A STORY I'll RE-
LATE TO YOU OF THE GREAT AMERICAN BUM. OH, ITS EARLY IN THE MORNING AND THE
DEW IS ON THE GROUND THE BUM ARISES FROM HIS NEST AND GAZES ALL AROUND

THE GREAT AMERICAN BUM

THE bourgeois is too likely to regard the hobo as a worthless parasite who never works. This is not always true. Most hoboes are migratory workers who lead the wandering life from choice. They are quite willing to forgo the comfort and security of conventional life for the freedom and variety of the road. The following humorous song, from Paul Dooley's repertory, catches the fascination of hobo life, as well as listing some of the hobo's occupations.

Come all you cinder grifters
  And listen while I hum—
A story I'll relate to you
  Of the great American bum.

Oh, it's early in the morning,
  And the dew is on the ground.
The bum arises from his nest
  And gazes all around.

From the box car and the haystack
  He gazes everywhere.
He never turns back upon his track
  Until he gets a square.

I've beat my way from 'Frisco Bay
To the rockbound coast of Maine
To Canada and Mexico
And wandered back again.

I've met town clowns and harness bulls
As tough as cops can be.
I've been in ev'ry calaboose
In this land of liberty.

I've topped the spruce and worked the sluice
And I've taken a turn at the plow;
I've searched for gold in the rain and cold
And I've worked on a river scow.

I've dug the clam and built the dam,
And packed the elusive prune,
But my troubles pale when I hit the trail
A-packing my old balloon!

Oh, a-standing in the railroad yards
A-waiting for a train—
Waiting for a westbound freight,
But I think it's all in vain.

Going east they're loaded—
Going west sealed tight.
I think we'll have to get aboard
A fast express tonight.

O, lady, would you be kind enough
To appease my appetite,
For really I'm so hungry
I don't know where to sleep tonight.

We are four bums, four doozy old bums,
We live like dukes and oils,*
We're having good luck in bumming our chuck,
God bless the man who toils.

Oh, sleeping against the tool-house,
And sleeping against the station—
Plenty of running water
Is the only recommendation.

I met a man the other day,
I never had met before
He asked me if I wanted a job
A-shovelin' iron ore.

I asked him what the wages was,
And he says, "Two bits a ton."
I says, "Old man, go chase yourself,
I'd rather be a bum!"

* earls

THE HOBO'S LAST LAMENT

This variant of "The Dying Hobo" adds a few touches to the droll conception of heaven set forth in the original ballad. Some versions have the hobo's last words addressed to his girl in Muncie rather than to his pal in 'Frisco.

Beside a Denver watertank
  One cold and dreary day
Sheltered by a boxcar
  A dying hobo lay.
His partner knelt beside him
  And slowly stroked his head
As he listened to the last words
  The dying hobo said:

"I'm going to a far away land
  Where prospects all are bright,
Where rivers run with whiskey
  And you get dead drunk each night.
Where St. Peter runs the flop-house
  And angels walk the drag,
And no cheap dick can shake you down
  And take away your swag.

"Where the rattlers all run empty
And when you wants to ride,
The Boss Con says, a-smilin',
'Podner, won't you get inside?'
Where everything is doozy
And the nights are two months long,
Where no one tries to gyp you
And no one does you wrong.

"Just tell me pal in 'Frisco
His face no more I'll view,
For I have flipped a red-ball freight,
I'll ride it straight on through. . ."
He gave a gasp, his head sank down
And open gaped his mouth—
His partner hooked his coat and pants
And caught a rattler south.

THE HOBO MANDALAY

HERE is a typical hobo parody. Just as Robert Burns found his verse forms in old Scottish songs, so the untrained hobo poet is likely to model his verses on some familiar poem. Kipling is widely memorized among hobo *littérateurs* and his work readily lends itself to hobo poesy.

By the lake-front near Chicago,
  With her elbows on her knee,
There's a widder-woman waiting
  And I know she waits for me.

When the wind is from the stockyards
  Every odor seems to say,
"Come back, you lost star-boarder,
  Come back, you skunk, and pay."

Her apron it was greasy,
  And her hair it hung in strings,
And her name was Hannah Sukey,
  But it had been lots o' things.

When I first saw her a-diggin'
  Up the makin's for a stew,

She wasn't wastin' nothing
That a dog could chaw in two.

Bloody rough for me to lead,
Toothless, sallow and knock-kneed,
Wasn't caring much for class, though—
What I needed was a feed.

When the bunch had grabbed their hand-out
And we had 'em on the go,
Then she'd start me for "Dutch" Ryan's
With a two-bit piece to throw.

With her head upon my shoulder
At the second growler full,
She was lonesome, 'bo, that widder,
With the rough stuff that she'd pull.

How I used to feed her full,
Of the mush-talk and the bull,
For the snow had begun blowin'
And I didn't like to pull.

But that's all put behind me,
Long ago and far away,
Since I hit out for St. Looey
One night on the C. & A.

But they're tellin' in the jungles
  That the winter's one best bet
For a young and handsome hobo
  Is to be a widder's pet.

Oh, them boardin' kitchen smells,
  As she fed me jams and jells,
And the skuds of suds from Ryan's—
  I won't ever need naught else!

Ship me somewhere south of Chi, though,
  Where the bleedin' mob ain't cursed
With a Volstead disposition
  And a man can quench his thirst.

For the winter snows are falling,
  And it's there that I would be,
Either Juarez or Havana—
  With a widder on my knee!

JUNGLE DIN

I HAVE an idea that the following choice specimen of hobo parody is fragmentary, but eight lines were all that the tall boy with whom I walked out of Hot Springs could recite for me.

I was a greenhorn at bummin',
Hungry more times than I'll tell,
But Carbide, a hobo, he showed me,
And Carbide was clever as hell.

Mixed up a rare lot o' scrapin's—
When he was through, he said, "Jim,
We don't need a pan, just a rusty tin can—"
And I learned about mongee from him.

MULLIGAN STEW

MULLIGAN is the hobo's one contribution to American victualry. Its ingredients are seldom the same: any and all vegetables and meats that come to hand go into its making. The hobo regards it as his national dish, and many a "dead one" retains a liking for it that amounts to affection.

It was a hot summer's day in the jungles
And the sun burned the sand on the ground;
The mulligan stew it was boiling,
And it bubbled a most pleasant sound.

We had postponed our breakfast and dinner
In our efforts to get over the road,
And each bo looked hungry and weary
As he crouched on the ground like a toad.

Our pal, Checkers Gilbert was talking,
As he pushed a few sticks on the fire,
Of the days when the road was hard traveling—
Holy Jeez! but that guy was some liar!

To begin with, he was a machinist,
A barber, a plumber, a cook,

An agitator, poet and tinner,
And said he had once wrote a book.

He told of the burgs he had discovered,
From Maine to the Oregon woods;
He had bummed every guy up in Portland
And made them come acrost with the goods.

He had bummed the coast clear down to 'Frisco,
And had starred where the bathers all roam,
For he had saved about a dozen from drowning,
But had left all the medals at home.

Well, he cut up the spuds and the onions,
And shovelled them into the stew;
He stirred them around with a paddle,
Then he added a carrot or two.

And then he began on a story
Of the days when the railroads were few
And how he had whipped single-handed
Three bulls and a manifest crew.

We sat there like humans half-living,
On the stew-pot we centered out stares,
And wished that the cook-up was ready,
For we was as hungry as bears.

But Checkers kept right on talking
Of days when the West was so wild,
And how he had killed a whole wolf-pack
To save the young life of a child.

Now Checkers, he was a good fellow,
As far as good fellowship goes,
But he will never again be a hero,
Or kill any more of his foes.

He is sleeping at peace in the valley,
O'er his head grows the laurel and fern;
He will ride no more bumpers on rattlers,
For he let that damned mulligan burn!

PIE IN THE SKY

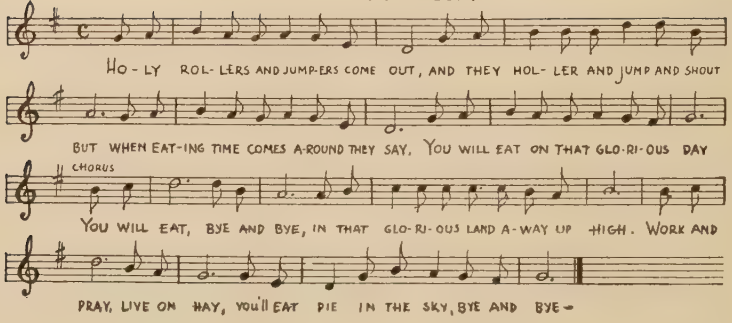
At the missions where the hobo sometimes applies for food and shelter he hears and becomes familiarized with religious tunes. This, in part, accounts for the amazing popularity, among hoboes, of Joe Hill's parodies. One of the best known is "Pie in the Sky," which Hill adapted to the tune of "In the Sweet Bye and Bye." Its spirit is indicative of the hobo's resentful attitude toward organized religion, and, very possibly, is a more genuine expression than the mission stiff's testimonials.

Long haired preachers come out every night,
Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right;
But when asked about something to eat,
They will answer in accents so sweet:

Chorus:

You will eat bye and bye,
In that glorious land above the sky
(way up high)
Work and pray, live on hay,
You'll get pie in the sky when you die.
(that's no lie!)

PIE IN THE SKY


HO - LY ROL- LERS AND JUMP-ERS COME OUT, AND THEY HOL- LER AND JUMP AND SHOUT
BUT WHEN EAT-ING TIME COMES A-ROUND THEY SAY, YOU WILL EAT ON THAT GLO-RI-OUS DAY
CHORUS
YOU WILL EAT, BYE AND BYE, IN THAT GLO-RI-OUS LAND A-WAY UP HIGH. WORK AND
PRAY, LIVE ON HAY, YOU'LL EAT PIE IN THE SKY, BYE AND BYE-

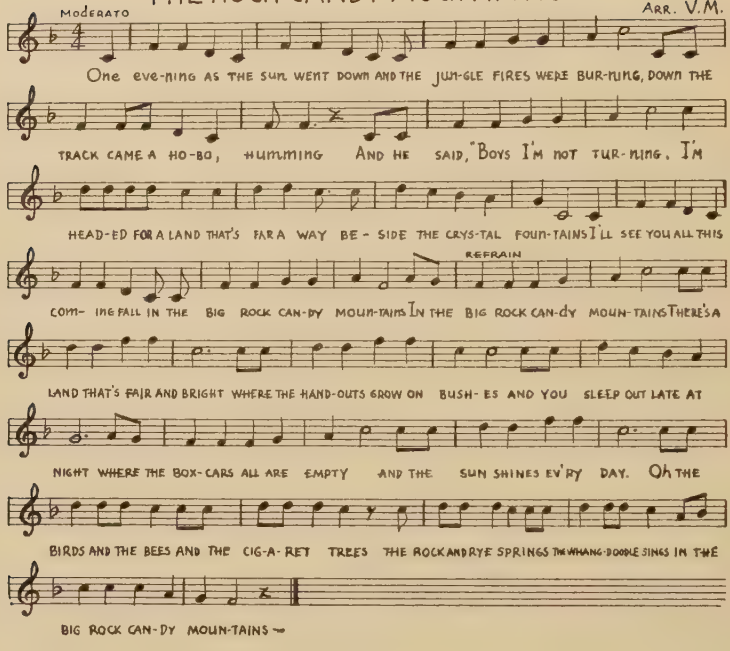
And the starvation army they play,
And they sing and they clap and they pray,
Till they get all your coin on the drum,
Then they'll tell you when you're on the bum:

Holy rollers and jumpers come out,
And they holler and jump and they shout,
But when eating time comes around they will say,
"You will eat on that glorious day."

THE ROCK CANDY MOUNTAINS -

Moderato

Arr. V.M.


One eve-ning as the sun went down and the jun-gle fires were bur-ning, down the
track came a ho-bo, humming And he said, "Boys I'm not tur-ning. I'm
head-ed for a land that's far a way be - side the crys-tal foun-tains I'll see you all this
REFRAIN
com- ing fall in the big rock can-dy moun-tains In the big rock can-dy moun-tains There's a
land that's fair and bright where the hand-outs grow on bush- es and you sleep out late at
night where the box-cars all are empty and the sun shines ev'ry day. Oh the
birds and the bees and the cig-a-ret trees the rock and rye springs the whang-doodle sings in the
big rock can-dy moun-tains

THE BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAINS II

WHEN the hobo bard smites his lyre and sings of Utopia, a rare spirit of burlesque moves through his song. The following selection is very similar to that better known hobo hymn, "The Dying Hobo," and a few of the lines are identical.

One evening as the sun went down
And the jungle fire was burning,
Down the track came a hobo, hamming,
And he said, "Boys, I'm not turning.
I'm headed for a land that's far away—
Beside the crystal fountains—
I'll see you all this coming fall
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

"In the Big Rock Candy Mountains,
There's a land that's fair and bright,
Where the handouts grow on bushes
And you sleep out every night.
Where the boxcars all are empty
And the sun shines ev'ry day—
Oh, the birds and the bees and the cigaret trees,

The rock and rye springs where the whangdoodle sings,
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

"In the Big Rock Candy Mountains,
All the cops have wooden legs,
And the bulldogs all have rubber teeth,
And the hens lay softboiled eggs.
The farmers' trees are full of fruit,
And the barns are full of hay.
Oh, I'm bound to go where there ain't no snow,
Where the sleet don't fall and the wind don't blow,
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

"In the Big Rock Candy Mountains,
You never change your socks,
And the little streams of alkyhol
Come trickling down the rocks.
The shacks all have to tip their hats
And the railroad bulls are blind,
There's a lake of stew and of whisky, too,
You can paddle all around in a big canoe,
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

"In the Big Rock Candy Mountains,
The jails are made of tin,
And you can bust right out again
As soon as they put you in.

There ain't no shorthandled shovels,
No axes, saws or picks—
I'm a-going to stay where you sleep all day—
Oh, they boiled in oil the inventor of toil
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

"Oh, come with me, and we'll go see
The Big Rock Candy Mountains."

THE SWEET POTATO MOUNTAINS

MANY of Alton Slim's adventures in the Sweet Potato Mountains are too bizarre for print, but the following fragment of the ballad indicates that the fantastic region in which the old 'bo settled down is not unlike that other promised land, the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

Alton Slim was a floater,
And he rambled all around;
The Sweet Potato Mountains
Was where he settled down:

Where poke-outs grow on bushes
And bump 'boes in the eyes,
And every night at ten o'clock
The clouds rain apple pies.

Where the gumps crawl into the pan,
And fry themselves nice and brown;
Where cows churn their own butter
And squirt the milk all around.

Oh, cigaret vines and ham 'n' egg trees,
And bread sprouts from the ground,

Where white-line springs squirt booze to your knees,
And there's plenty to go 'round.

In the Sweet Potato Mountains,
All the broads are plump and fair;
When Slim sees the rattlers runnin',
He says, "Go on, I don't care!"

Oh, there are beef-stew falls where the wimpus bird calls,
And the broads swim in the fountains,
Slim's a homeguard, but life ain't so hard
In the Sweet Potato Mountains.

IV. WOBBLY SONGS

EVERYWHERE YOU GO

TRAMPS have mastered the fine art of living without toil, but the vagrant who fits the hobo classification is a migratory worker, bumming his way from place to place and engaging, usually, in seasonal occupations. The following is a hobo troubadour's rhymed report of the employment situation:

Things are dull in San Francisco,
  On the hog in New Orleans,
Rawther punk in cultured Boston,
  Famed for codfish, God and beans.

On the fritz in Kansas City,
  Out in Denver things are jarred;
Hear 'em beefing in Chicago
  That the times are getting hard.

Same old hooey in St. Looie;
  And all the more in Baltimore;
Coin don't rattle in Seattle
  Like it did in days of yore.

Jobs are scant around Atlanta,
  All through Texas it is still

And there's very little stirring
In the town of Looieville.

There's a howl from Cincinnati,
New York City, Brooklyn, too;
In Milwaukee's foamy limits
There is little work to do.

In the face of all such rumors,
It seems not far wrong to say
That no matter where you're going,
You had better stay away.

HALLELUJAH, BUM AGAIN

It is hardly safe to classify the following widely-sung ballad as a Wobbly song. There is some dispute as to its origin. Budd L. McKillips, who has himself written some first-rate hobo poetry, has given me the following notes on "Hallelujah, Bum Again's" history:

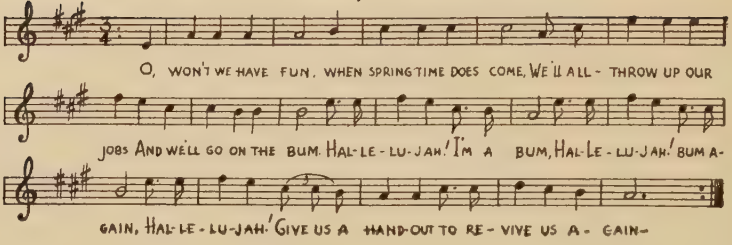
> A member of the I. W. W. is credited with having written the words to "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum." The question of authorship isn't worth an argument, but if anybody will take the trouble to do some investigating, he will find that "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum" was a lilting, care-free song at least eight years before the I. W. W. came squalling into the industrial world. . . . The song was found scribbled on the wall of a Kansas City jail cell where an old hobo, known as "One-Finger Ellis," had spent the night, recovering from an overdose of rotgut whiskey.

The first version is that of One-Finger Ellis, as well as McKillips can recall it, and the second version is the song that the Wobblies sing today. Both songs are sung to the hymn tune, "Hallelujah, Thine the Glory."

I

Oh, why don't I work like the other men do?
How the hell can I work when the skies are so blue?
Hallelujah, I'm a bum!
Hallelujah, bum again,
Hallelujah! Bum a handout,
Revive me again.

HALLELUJAH, BUM AGAIN-


O, WON'T WE HAVE FUN, WHEN SPRING-TIME DOES COME, WE'll ALL - THROW UP OUR
JOBS AND WE'LL GO ON THE BUM. HAL-LE-LU-JAH! I'M A BUM, HAL-LE-LU-JAH! BUM A-
GAIN, HAL-LE-LU-JAH! GIVE US A HAND-OUT TO RE-VIVE US A-GAIN-

If I was to work and save all I earn,
I could buy me a bar and have whiskey to burn.

Oh, I love Jim Hill, he's an old friend of mine,
Up North I ride rattlers all over his line.

Oh, I ride box cars and I ride fast mails,
When its cold in the winter I sleep in the jails.

I passed by a saloon and I hear someone snore,
And I found the bar-tender asleep on the floor.

I stayed there and drank till a fly-mug came in,
And he put me to sleep with a sap on the chin.

Next morning in court I was still in a haze,
When the judge looked at me, he said, "Thirty days!"

Some day a long train will run over my head,
And the sawbones will say, "Old One-Finger's dead!"

II

When the springtime does come,
Oh, won't we have fun!
We'll throw up our jobs
And we'll go on the bum.

Chorus:

Hallelujah, I'm a bum,
Hallelujah, bum again,
Hallelujah, give us a handout
To revive us again.

Oh, springtime has come,
And I'm just out of jail,
Ain't got no money,
It all went for bail.

I went up to a house
And I knocked on the door.
A lady came out, says,
"You been here before!"

I went up to a house
Asked for some bread,
A lady came out, says,
"The baker is dead."

I went up to a house,
Asked for a pair of pants;
A lady came out, says,
"I don't clothe no tramps!"

I went into a saloon,
And I bummed him for a drink;
He give me a glass
And he showed me the sink.

Oh, I love my boss,
And my boss loves me;
That is the reason
I'm so hun-ga-ree!

"Why don't you go to work
Like all the other men do?"
"How the hell we going to work
When there ain't no work to do?"

HARVEST LAND

THE hoboes, by their own admission, "harvest the wheat that the world may eat," and many of their songs have references to the rigours of the Middle Western wheat harvest. The following song is set to the old hymn tune, "Beulah Land."

The harvest drive is on again,
John Farmer needs a lot of men
To work beneath the Kansas heat
And shock and stack and thresh his wheat.

Chorus:

Oh, Farmer John—poor Farmer John,
Our faith in you is overdrawn.
Old fossil of the feudal age,
Your only creed is going wage—
"Bull Durham" will not buy our brawn—
You're out of luck—poor Farmer John.

You advertise in Omaha,
"Come, leave the valley of the Kaw."
Nebraska calls, "Don't be misled,
We'll furnish you a feather bed!"

Then South Dakota lets out a roar,
"We need ten thousand men or more;
Our grain is turning, prices drop!
For God's sake save our bumper crop!"

In North Dakota—(I'll be darn)
The wise guy sleeps in a hoosier's barn,
—Then hoosier breaks into his snore
And yells, "It's quarter after four."

Chorus:

Oh, Harvest Land—Sweet burning sand!
As on the sun-kissed field I stand,
I look across the plain
And wonder if it's going to rain—
I vow by all the brands of Cain
That I will not be here again.

THE HARVEST STIFF'S "TIPPERARY"

THE song-poem below, set to the tune of "Tipperary," is sometimes called the "Hobo's War Song." It was written by a wob named Pat Brennan, who carried on the precedent set by Joe Hill—that of adapting new words to old tunes.

We are coming home, John Farmer;
  We are coming back to stay.
For nigh on fifty years or more,
  We've gathered up your hay.
We have slept out in your hayfields;
  We've heard your morning shout;
We've heard you wondering,
  "Where in hell's them pesky goabouts?"

Chorus:

It's a long way, now understand me;
  It's a long way to town;
It's a long way across the prairies,
  And to hell with Farmer Brown.
Here goes for better wages,
  And the hours must come down,

For we're out for a winter stake this summer,
And we want no scabs around.

You've paid the going wages,
That's what kept us on the bum,
You say you've done your duty,
You chin-whiskered son-of-a-gun.
We have sent your kids to college,
But still you rave and shout
And calls us tramps and hoboes,
And pesky goabouts.

But now the long wintry breezes
Are a-shaking our poor frames,
And the long drawn days of hunger
Try to drive us 'bos insane.
It is driving us to action;
We are organized today;
Us pesky tramps and hoboes
Are coming back to stay.

THE HOBO AND THE RIGHT-OF-WAY

THE following poem may have had its origins in the earlier lines:

> He built the road,
> With others of his class he built the road
> Now o'er it, many a weary mile, he packs his load
> Chasing a job, spurred on by hunger's goad,
> He walks and walks and wonders why
> In hell he built the road.

This appeared as a part of a pen drawing of a blanket stiff walking down the right of way, and the cartoon was widely circulated among migratory workers before the war.

> The hobo built the right-of-way
> That reaches from coast to coast,
> Over which the fast trains run
> Of which we proudly boast.
> But the hobo does not ride the train
> When he wishes to take a trip;
> He hits the ties between the rails,
> And carries his blanket and grip.

Although he built the right-of-way,
Over which trains go and come,
He is slated in the book of life
As just a common bum,
Driven about from place to place,
With no bed on which to lay—
Only the leaves in the jungles
Along the right-of-way.

The engine shrieks a loud shrill blast
As it passes the hobo by;
The head shack gives him a leering grin,
As he trudges tie on tie.
Never thinking the hobo clan
Were the ones who blazed the way
Over the plains and through the hills,
They made the right-of-way.

THE MYSTERIES OF A HOBO'S LIFE

T-Bone Slim is a wobbly writer who has been credited with having coined many hobo slang terms heard in the jungles today. In the columns of *The Industrial Worker* he is said to have originated and popularized the telescopic word, *brisbanality*, applying it to the writings of a highly-paid American journalist. He is the author of the following song, set to the tune of "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

I took a job on an extra gang,
  Way up on the mountain,
I paid my fee and the shark shipped me,
  And the ties soon I was countin'.

The boss put me to driving spikes
  And the sweat was enough to blind me,
He didn't seem to like my pace,
  So I left the job behind me.

I grabbed a-hold of an old freight train
  And around the country traveled,
The mysteries of a hobo's life
  To me were soon unraveled.

I traveled east and I traveled west,
And the shacks could never find me;
Next morning I was far away
From the job I left behind me.

I kicked in and joined the wobs
And now in the ranks you'll find me;
Hurrah for the cause—to hell with the boss
And the job I left behind me!

MY WANDERING BOY

THE wobblies take pride in the fact that theirs is a movement that sings, and wherever they congregate they carol their ballads of protest. In the following song, again they have appropriated a familiar tune to carry the burden of their propaganda to hoboes and working stiffs.

Where is my wandering boy tonight,
The boy of his mother's pride?
He's counting ties with his bed on his back,
Or else he is bumming a ride.

Chorus:

Oh, where is my boy tonight?
Oh, where is my boy tonight?
He's on the head end of an overland train—
That's where your boy is tonight.

His heart may be pure as the morning dew,
But his clothes are a sight to see.
He's pulled for a vag, his excuse won't do.
"Thirty days," says the judge, you see.

"I was looking for work, oh, judge," he said,
Says the judge, "I have heard that before,"
So to join the chain gang far off he is led
To hammer the rocks some more.

Don't search for your wandering boy tonight,
Let him play the old game if he will—
A hobo, a bum, he'll never be right,
So long's he's a wage-slave still.

THE POPULAR WOBBLY

HERE is another song from the facile pen of T-Bone Slim. It is sung to the tune of the once-popular song, "They Go Wild Over Me." Other wob songs are sung to the tunes of such innocuous hobo favourites as "Portland County Jail" and "The Wabash Cannonball."

I'm as mild mannered 'bo as can be,
And I've never done any harm that I can see,
Still on me they put a ban
And they threw me in the can:
They go wild, simply wild, over me.

They accuse me of ras-cal-i-ty,
But I don't know why they pick on me,
I'm as gentle as a lamb,
But they take me for a ram:
They go wild, simply wild, over me.

They go wild, simply wild, over me.
Oh, the bull, he went wild over me,
And he held his gun where all could see,
He was breathing awful hard
When he saw my wobbly card—
He went wild, simply wild, over me.

Then the squire, he went wild over me,
And I plainly saw we never could agree,
So I let His Nibs obey
What his conscience had to say,
He went wild, simply wild, over me.

Oh the jailer, he went wild over me,
And he locked me up and threw away the key—
It seems to be the rage,
So they keep me in a cage,
They go wild, simply wild, over me.

I'm referring to the bed-bug and the flea—
They disturb my slumber deep,
And I murmur in my sleep:
They go wild, simply wild, over me.

THE TIMBER-BEAST'S LAMENT

WHEN the hobo, or migratory worker, strikes a lumber camp he becomes a timber-beast. The following ballad is an apparent parody of Kipling's "Tommy Atkins."

I'm on the boat for the camp
With a sick and aching head;
I've blowed another winter's stake,
And got the jims instead.

It seems I'll never learn the truth
That's written plain as day,
It's, the only time they welcome you
Is when you make it pay.

And it's "blanket-stiff" and "jungle-hound,"
And "pitch him out the door,"
But it's "Howdy, Jack, old-timer,"
When you've got the price for more.

Oh, tonight the boat is rocky,
And I ain't got a bunk,
Not a rare of cheering likker,
Just a turkey full of junk.

All I can call my life's possession,
Is just what I carry 'round,
For I've blowed the rest on skid-roads
Of a hundred gyppo towns.

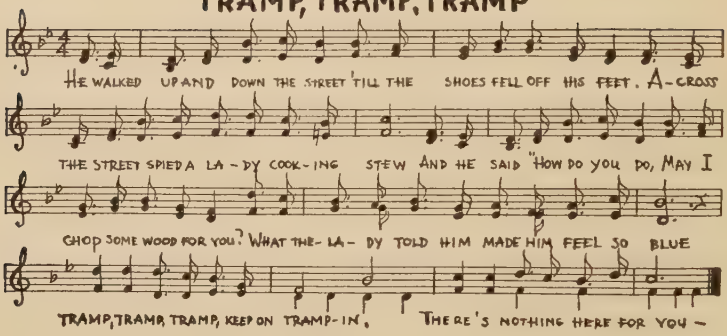
And it's "lumberjack" and "timber-beast,"
And "Give these bums a ride,"
But it's "Have one on the house, old boy,"
If you're stepping with the tide.

And the chokers will be heavy,
Just as heavy, just as cold,
When the hooker gives the high-ball,
And we start to dig for gold.

And I'll cuss the siren skid-road,
With its blatant, drunken tune,
But then, of course, I'll up and make
Another trip next June.

But the "logging-stiff" and "timber-beast"
Is the stuff that doesn't take,
For it's always, "Jack, old-timer,"
When you're landing with a stake.

TRAMP, TRAMP, TRAMP


HE WALKED UP AND DOWN THE STREET 'TILL THE SHOES FELL OFF HIS FEET. A-CROSS
THE STREET SPIED A LA-DY COOK-ING STEW AND HE SAID "HOW DO YOU DO, MAY I
CHOP SOME WOOD FOR YOU? WHAT THE-LA-DY TOLD HIM MADE HIM FEEL SO BLUE
TRAMP, TRAMP, TRAMP, KEEP ON TRAMP-IN'. THERE'S NOTHING HERE FOR YOU —

THE THREE TRAMPS

Joe Hill, whose real name was Joseph Hillstrom, is the hobo's poet laureate. His compositions, all of which are arranged for old and familiar tunes, continue to gain popularity, and many people sing them now without realizing the original incendiary purpose of the songs.

Hill came to this country as a Swedish immigrant after having learned English as a sailor. Like Masefield, he polished cuspidors in a New York saloon. He moved West, worked in a Chicago machine shop, made the wheat harvest and finally drifted to California. At some time during this hoboing period of his career, Hill became imbued with the ideals of Karl Marx, and he enlisted as a wobbly agitator. To this end he began to write songs. He wrote a rousing parody on "Casey Jones" and it was sung extensively during a railroad strike on the Southern Pacific. His parodies, exceptionally clever at times, found immediate popularity among the malcontents.

In 1915, while Hill was organizing workers in Salt Lake City, he was arrested, charged with murder. Although he was vindicated later, he was convicted and executed by a firing squad in the Utah State Peniten-

tiary. His body was shipped to Chicago for cremation, and his funeral there was attended by thousands of hoboes who swarmed to pay him tribute.

The song on the opposite page, set to the tune of "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys are Marching" is one of Joe Hill's many parodies.

If you will shut your trap,
I will tell you 'bout a chap,
That was broke and up against it too for fair;
He was not the kind to shirk,
He was looking hard for work,
But he heard the same old story everywhere.

Chorus:

Tramp, tramp, tramp, keep on a tramping,
Nothing doing here for you;
If I catch you 'round again,
You will wear the ball and chain,
Keep on tramping, that's the best thing you can do.

He walked up and down the street
'Till the shoes fell off his feet;
In a house he spied a lady cooking stew,
And he said, "How do you do,
May I chop some wood for you?"
What the lady told him made him feel so blue:

'Cross the street a sign he read,
"Work for Jesus," so it said,
And he said, "Here is my chance, I'll surely try,"
And he kneeled upon the floor
Till his knees got rather sore,
But at eating time he heard the preacher say:

Down the street he met a cop,
And the copper made him stop,
And he asked him, "When did you blow into town?"
Come with me to the judge."
But the judge he said, "Oh fudge!
Bums that have no money needn't come around."

Finally came the happy day
When his life did pass away,
He was sure he'd go to heaven when he died.
When he reached the pearly gate,
Santa Peter, mean old skate,
Slammed the gate right in his face and loudly cried:

THE TWO BUMS

THE hobo troubadour is capable of a deep resentment, and occasionally he turns his talents against the "system" that makes of him an outcast. The following succinct contrast, by an unknown writer, is a typical poem of protest.

The bum on the rods is hunted down
  As the enemy of mankind,
The other is driven around to his club
  Is fêted, wined and dined.

And they who curse the bum on the rods
  As the essence of all that is bad,
Will greet the other with a winning smile,
  And extend the hand so glad.

The bum on the rods is a social flea
  Who gets an occasional bite,
The bum on the plush is a social leech,
  Blood-sucking day and night.

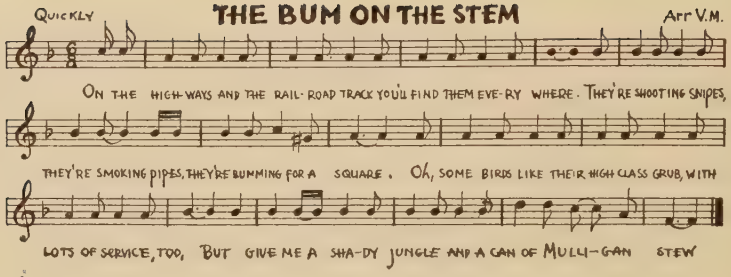
The bum on the rods is a load so light
  That his weight we scarcely feel,

But it takes the labor of dozens of men
To furnish the other a meal.

As long as you sanction the bum on the plush
The other will always be there,
But rid yourself of the bum on the plush
And the other will disappear.

Then make an intelligent, organized kick,
Get rid of the weights that crush.
Don't worry about the bum on the rods,
Get rid of the bum on the plush!

V. HOMEGUARD VERSIONS


Quickly
THE BUM ON THE STEM
Arr V.M.
On the high-ways and the rail-road track you'll find them eve-ry where. They're shooting snipes,
they're smoking pipes, they're bumming for a square. Oh, some birds like their high class grub, with
lots of service, too, But give me a sha-dy jungle and a can of Mulli-gan stew

THE BUM ON THE STEM

THE humorous phases of an uneasy life on the stem are again presented in this vagrant ditty. Another geegaw from Paul Dooley's songpack, it is characteristic hobo humour. Banshee wails from the harmonica, in imitation of a distant train whistle, interspersed the stanzas and added to the effectiveness.

On the highways and the railroad tracks,
  You'll find bums everywhere.
They're shootin' snipes, they're smokin' pipes,
  They're moochin' for a square.

Oh, some birds like their highclass grub,
  With lots of service, too,
But give me a shady jungle
  And a can of mulligan stew.

There's lots of joy and sunshine,
  Wherever you chance to roam,
But how are you going to see them
  If you always stay at home?

Oh, plinging down the highway,
  Going to be gone so long;

If you don't think I'm goin',
  Just you count the days I'm gone.

Once I met John Farmer;
  He stopped me on my way,
He said, "I've got some 'taters,
  And I want them dug today."

"Naw, I can't dig no 'taters,
  Because I'm gettin' fat;
Go get the guy that planted them,
  'Cause he knows where they're at!"

While I was sleeping in the shade,
  Just to pass the time away,
A man came up and asked me,
  To help him pitch some hay.

He said his land was rollin'.
  I said, "Now is that true?
Just roll it past this shady spot,—
  I'll see what I can do!"

Oh, sleeping among the daisies
  After hiking all the day—
Some folks like a foldin' bed,
  But give me the new mown hay.

My clothes are gettin' ragged,
  My shoes are gettin' thin—
What do I care?—I get the air—
  I'm on the bum again.

The nights are gettin' colder,
  And soon we'll all be froze;
I'm going to a sunny state
  Where the weather fits me clothes.

Oh, waiting at the water-tank
  For a rattler passin' by—
If she don't stop here
  I'll catch her on the fly.

I hear her whistle blowin'
  And yonder comes the train—
I'll see you all in 'Frisco.
  I'm on the bum again!

THE MERRY KING

THIS convivial ballad is heard wherever men congregate. The following version gives enough of its lines to explain its reputation.

The minstrels sing of a British king
  Who reigned long years ago.
He ruled his land with an iron hand,
  But his mind was weak and low.

His only nether garment was a woolen undershirt;
  He tried in his pride to cover his hide,
But he couldn't hide the dirt,
  Though he was the very merry King of England.

He loved to hunt the royal stag
  Within the royal wood,
But most of all his majesty loved
  To do his subjects good.

The Queen of Spain was an amourous jane,
  An amourous jane was she,
And, as well as to rule, she loved to fool
  With the king across the sea.

She sent a special message
  By a special messenger,
Inviting him to spend a month
  In royal sport with her.

Now when King Philip heard of this
  He gave an awful snort,
And he said, "She loves my rival,
  Because I am so short."

So he sent the Duke of Sipandsap
  To give the Queen a warning slap,
And he didn't do a thing to
  The merry king of England.

Now when news of this foul deed
  Reached Windsor's royal hall,
The king he swore by the crown he wore
  That he liked King Philip's gall.

So he offered half his kingdom
  And a smile from Queen Hortense
To any man in all his van
  Who'd get the King of France.

So the crafty duke of Suffolk
  He set sail for sunny France:
He said he was a fruiterer,
  And he gave the King one glance.

Around the King he fastened a thong;
He mounted his horse and galloped along,
And dragged the King of France
Back to the merry King of England.

The King threw up his breakfast,
And he fell upon the floor,
For during the ride his rival's pride
Had stretched a rod or more.

From all the countryside around
The girls came down to Lundon town,
Shouting, "To hell with the British crown,
And the very merry King of England."

So the King of France usurped the throne,
But his scepter was his very own,
And he sat in the seat out of which he had beat
The very merry King of England.

Refrain:

O Gawd, help the very merry King of England!

THE HOBO'S LAST RIDE

As a tribe, the hoboes are not a sentimental lot. I have never heard a mammy song in a jungle camp. Tearful selections are not popular among the fraternity, and the hobo is more likely to burlesque sentimentality than to take it seriously. (See "The Dying Hobo," and "Down in the Mohawk Valley.") The following poem by A. L. Kirby, however, is superior to the usual mawkish homeguard song about hoboes.

In the Dodge City yards of the Santa Fe
  Stood a freight made up for the east.
The engineer, with oil and waste,
  Was grooming his iron beast,
While ten cars back in the murky dusk
  A boxcar door swung wide,
And a hobo lifted his pal aboard
  To start on his long last ride.

A lantern swung, and the freight pulled out,
  The engine gathered speed;
The engineer pulled the throttle wide,
  And clucked to his iron steed,
While ten cars back, in the empty

The hobo rolled a pill,
And the flaring match showed his pardner's face,
Stark white and deathly still.

The train wheels clicked on the coupling joints,
The song for a rambler's ears,
And the hobo talked to the lifeless form
Of one he'd palled with for years.
"For a long, long stretch we've rambled, Jack,
With the luck of the men that roam,
A backdoor step for a dining room,
And a boxcar for a home.

"We've dodged the bulls on the C. B. & Q,
And the shacks on the Chesapeake.
We bummed the Leadville narrow gauge
In the days of Cripple Creek;
We've coasted down through Sunny Cal
On the rails of the old S. P.,
And of all you had, through good or bad,
One half belonged to me.

"One day you made me promise, Jack,
If I lived when you cashed in,
That I'd take you back and bury you
In the churchyard with your kin.
You seemed to know that I'd keep my word,
For you found that I was white,

And so I'm true to my promise, pal—
I'm keeping it tonight.

"I knew that the fever had you right.
The pill-roller wouldn't come.
Too busy treating the decent folks
To doctor a worn-out bum.
And I hadn't the dough to send you back,
So I'm taking you on the fly.
It's a fitting way for a 'bo to ride
To the sweet, sweet bye and bye."

The rattler rolled on its ribbons of steel,
Straight through to the east it sped;
The engineer, on his high cab-seat,
Kept his eye on the rails ahead,
While ten cars back, in the empty,
A lonely hobo sighed
For the days of old with his faithful pal,
Who was taking his last long ride.

ONLY A BUM

THERE are many sentimental ballads about hoboes that cannot properly be classed as hobo ballads. The following is one of these. I got it from a blind accordion player on a street corner in Oklahoma City. He sang it to a hymn tune much like that of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," but much less spirited.

The engineer looked straight ahead
As the train sped through the night;
Then suddenly the engineer
Saw someone wave a light.

He tried to stop, but someway,
He knew 'twas all in vain;
The man who waved the light
Was ground dead beneath the train.

The engineer could see
A burning bridge ahead,
And to the bum beneath the train
These words he softly said:

Refrain:

"Though he's only a bum, only a bum,
He saved the lives of us all,
Though last night he slept in some farmer's barn,
Tonight he sleeps in Jesus' arms."

They buried him on Sunday morn,
All the passengers were there,
Their tears were flowing freely,
As the preacher said a prayer.

A choir from the church was there
To sing a hymn or two—
'Twas spring and the flowers were in bloom,
The sky above was blue.

The engineer fell on his knees
Beside the open grave,
And said, "This man, to save our lives,
His own he gladly gave."

Refrain:

"Though he's only a bum, only a bum,
He saved the lives of us all,
Last night he slept in some farmer's barn;
Tonight he sleeps in Jesus' arms."

THE STEW-BUM

ALL the elements of the tear-yanking hobo ballad are to be found in the stew-bum's story. It is one of "Down in Lehigh Valley's" many variants, and the classic "Face on the Barroom Floor" is not far removed from it.

'Scuse me, pard, for hornin' in, but I'm upon the blink.
Ain't got a jitney in me kick, and dyin' for a drink.

I ain't got the nerve or gall to brave you on the street,
But 'tain't exactly charity to dare a guy to treat—

I thought you would. God bless you, sir, gimme a little rye.
Oh, 'twasn't booze that got me down. That's no reason why.

Say, 'bo, you're young, I see. Yer only just a kid,
But I'm going to tell you somethin', I'll tell you what did.

And take it from a crummy bum that knows. Remember, pard,
'Sperience is a bitter school, my lessons been damn hard!

Mine's an old-time story, a simple, homely tale.
My name? Oh what's the dif? My home? Flop house or jail.

Ambition? Got none, 'cept to drink—and eat,
But once I was ambitious, and life to me was sweet!

Those days are but happy mem'ry, and happy days they wus—
She? Yes, 'twas a woman—and I give the moll the buzz.

She made me believe she loved me. They say that love is blind.
It's deaf and daffy, doped and drunk—the curse of all mankind.

She was young and pretty, and Mary was her name,
She had a face and figure that set my heart aflame.

I wasn't just exactly what you see a-standin' here,
I could look you in the face, not with a drunken leer,

But eye to eye. And here I am a rotten, sodden wreck,
Just driftin' on the sea of life, a two-spot in the deck.

Pal, I ain't a-stringin' you. S'help me God, I swear
That every word I say is straight. See this here lock of hair?

That's all I've got. Dead? Naw, she shook me cold.
All that I had to give was love. The other, he had gold—

And all that gold can buy. You can guess the rest.
She didn't even say good-bye. Perhaps 'twas for the best,

But 'tween you and me, 'twas plenty tough. Now, pard, was I to blame
For drifting to the gutter? Naw—you'd a-done the same!

Why, I'd bet my very life that she was on the square.
I saw, when looking in her eyes, a bit of heaven there.

And for that glimpse of heaven I've suffered worse'n hell,
She played me for a rummy—and me—of course I fell.

The fable of the apple told for the millionth time,
Told in song and story, of every age and clime.

I gladly staked my all for love, but played a losin' game—
Room for another? Sure! Hey, Bill, a little of the same!

THE SWEDE FROM NORTH DAKOTA

NELS ANDERSON, author of *The Hobo* and a connoisseur of hobo poesy, contributes the following song, to be sung to the tune of "Reuben, Reuben, I've Been Thinking." A "Jim Hill wagon," of course, is a freight.

I bin a Swade from Nort' Dakota,
Work on farmstead 'bout two yare;
Tank I go to Minnesota,
Go to Minneapolis to see great fair.

I buy me a suit, I buy me a bottle,
Dress me up way out of sight;
Yump on the tail of a Yim Hill wagon,
Yesus Chreest, I feel for fight.

I go down to Seven Corners
Where Salvation Army play,
One dem vomans come to me,
This is what dat voman say:

She say, "Will you work for Yesus?"
I say, "How much Yesus pay?"
She say, "Yesus don't pay nothing."
I say, "I won't work today."

OUR LIL

THIS ribald recitation is sometimes merged with "Down in Lehigh Valley." The action takes place in a western mining camp.

Lil was the best the camp produced:
Who ain't ****** Lil ain't n'er ******
Nor ever will,
For when Lil **** *** **** for keeps
And piles her victims up in heaps.

There was a standing bet 'round town
That the son of a b---- would ne'er be found
Who could ***** our Lil to a standstill
When a sawed-off guy called Greaser Pete
Came lopin' up from Sugar Creek
And he wasn't so short, and he wasn't so tall,
But, by Jesus Christ he surprised us all
When he *** ********* then and thar
And laid it acrost Murphy's bar.

We seen that Lil had met her mate;
To call off the bets was then too late.

So they arranged the mill
Behind the ----house on the hill
Where young and old could have a seat
And watch Greaser—**** ******
Then soft as is the evening breeze
That sighs beneath the cypress trees,
The bout began.

********** *** *
*** *** **** *** *** *** ***
*** *** *** ***** ***** ***
*** *** *** *** *******

The trees was red for miles around
Where -*** ******* had touched the ground,
But Lil died game boys, that I'll tell,
So what the hell, Bill, what the hell.

WHO SAID I WAS A BUM?

THIS song is a pseudo hobo ballad, typical of those sung by vaudeville and phonograph comedians, but it is accurate in that it draws a distinction, humorous though it may be, between "hobo" and "bum."

I've traveled East, I've traveled West,
I've been in every State,
A member of the Knights of Rest
With dues paid up to date.

There's just two things that I despise,
Two things I always shirk:
The first thing is a cake of soap,
The other one is work.

My life to me is just a spree
I'm always on a lark.
Somebody said, "You're just a bum."
And I don't like that remark.

Chorus:

Who said I was a bum?
Who said I was a bum?

I haven't worked in twenty years,
I guess I'm not so dumb.
And as I tramp along the road
The people hear me hum,
"I know I'm a hobo, but
Who said I was a bum?"

I must admit I never fit
  In any job, and say—
Whenever I see a pile of wood
  I look the other way.

I haven't shaved for nearly a year,
  I really am afraid,
Because I fear my wire beard
  Would break the razor blade.

The other day while on my way
  A cop gave me a chase.
I thought I heard him holler,
  "Take that mattress off yer face!"

I've been in every hospital
  That ever was built, by gum,
And every time they operate,
  They just take out my rum.

My coat is torn, my shoes're worn,
  There's holes in both my toes,

And what is worse I always nurse
A blossom on my nose.

And with a glance you'll see my pants
Are baggy at the knees
They're worn so thin I feel the wind
Blow through my B. V. D.'s.

But I ain't got a worry, boys,
Now what do you think of that?
There's nothing on my mind
Except my old straw hat.

I travel in the best of style,
No matter what the rates,
I ride in sidedoor pullman cars—
Some people call 'em freights.

I only eat one kind of food,
Just one, not any more—
I mean the kind of food
They hand out the kitchen door.

From coast to coast, no man can boast
Such popularity—
Each place I stop there is a cop
Who waits to welcome me.

I've been in all the finest jails
Beneath the shining sun.

Each time I face the judge I'm gone
For many months to come.

Now any place I hang my hat
Is home sweet home to me;
Oh how I love the guy who wrote
That sweet old melody!

Another song I'm wild about—
It hits me way down deep,
A tune I'm always singin' is:
"Please go 'way and let me sleep."

The millionaire is worried with
A lot of bills to pay
While all I have to worry about
Is whether I eat today.

Chrous:

Who said I was a bum?
Who said I was a bum?
Fifth Avenue when I air through
Is really just a slum.
I'll tell you who I really am,
I hope you'll keep it mum—
I know I'm a hobo, but
Who said I was a bum?

VI. HOBO CLASSICS

THE DEALER GETS IT ALL

A STOCK elocution from the repertory of a gutter jongleur. A punchdrunk lightweight named Punk Nelson, with whom I boarded an Iron Mountain freight at Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, recited it in the course of an afternoon's entertainment. The lines have an insolent swing, and the idiom is redolent of the road. Turn to the glossary for expressions not readily apparent.

Now, I'm not so blowsy wise, lads, as some o' you bums
today,
Who've rode the rods from 'Frisco to Greenland's icy
bay,
But I've glommed my share of rattlers—had a gunsil,
bo, or two;
And met some fancy yeggmen in a box-car goin'
through.

Yes, I've alkeed up in jungles, and I've flopped in new
mown hay—
I've bugged-up, bo, and mush-faked—done time in
old L. A.
I've marched with Coxey's army with a flock of wobbly
queer,

So I guess you'll get me right, 'bo, on the gab I'm spillin' here.

We'd rode the deck and gunnels on a pullman out o' Chi—
With Alton Red, the alky stiff, sloppin' up on Hopper's Rye,
We got ditched at Myno Junction, so we started in to ham,
Nine miles across the country to—the name don't make a damn!

When old Justice Grimes espied us, and called the constabule,
Who tossed us in the booby, and took away our mule.
Now I was feelin' salty and I glued Squire Grimes' hat,
When the town clown got hooty, and he flailed me with his bat.

He tapped me on the dingus—and mashed me on the dome,
While Alton sang a hobo song "Ten thousand miles to roam!"
The kid that played the saxophone cut loose with a jag-time air,
While I jigged a riggy hoe-down to the constabule's despair.

Then he tore his hair and ranted, and yowled out in his rage,
As he took me by the facus and tossed me in the cage
Where "Hikes" and "Spikes" and old "Bill Sykes";
"The Kid" from Montreal;
"Long String Bean," and "Seldom Seen" were monikers on the wall.

Next morning in the court-room the squire began to wail
When I offered him a chew of snipe to let me out on bail.
Old Richard he was horsin' and he swooned there in his seat,
So I done a fancy shuffle, and beat it up the street.

But the reubens they was horstile, and they banded forty strong,
And rushed me on the main stem like a bunch o' steers gone wrong.
They biffed me on the dolly, and they rode me on a rail;
Pitched me up and down the drag, and sloughed me back in jail.

Soon my nerves set out to pling me for a snort o' old snow ball,
While some gandy-dancer warbled "The Wabash Cannon-Ball."

Then I sprung a rosy lay-out on my side-pen Alton
Red,
And we blowed a toy o' white slufe that knocked the
willies dead.

Then Alton he got busy, and produced a fancy briar,
And we crushed the can at midnight, and decked an
eastbound flyer
That took us from this Podunk back to good old Chi—
And dropped us off at Hinky Dink's to sop up rock and
rye.

Now I'm not so blowsy wise, 'bos, as some grifters à la
mode;
I've done some niftik moochin' with the best bums on
the road.
I've been out on the lush-graft—and cracked a pete or
two;
I've tribed up with good grifters in the jungles on a
stew.

I've flopped out on the cinders; in a hoosier knowledge
box—
I've kipped in Ritzy hotels, and nipped some doozy
rocks,
But take this tip from me, boys, before you trip and
fall,
Old John Bum's life's a gamble and—the dealer gets it
all!

THE FACE ON THE BARROOM FLOOR

WRITTEN by H. A. D'Arcy in the early nineties, this dramatic reading has held its popularity for thirty-five years. It is declaimed by village elocutionists and barrelhouse virtuosos alike. Its author is said to have died in poverty several years ago.

'Twas a balmy summer evening, and a goodly crowd
was there
Which well-nigh filled Joe's bar-room, on the corner
by the square;
And as the songs and witty stories came through the
open door,
A vagabond crept slowly in and posed upon the floor.

"Where did it come from?" someone said. "The wind
has blown it in."
"What does it want?" another cried, "Some whiskey,
rum or gin?"
"Here, Toby, sic 'em, if you're equal to the work—
I wouldn't touch him with a fork, he's filthy as a
Turk."

This badinage the poor wretch took with stoical good
grace;

In fact, he smiled as though he thought he'd struck the proper place.
"Come, boys, I know there's kindly hearts among so good a crowd—
To be in such good company would make a deacon proud.

"Give me a drink, that's what I want—I'm out of funds, you know,
When I had cash to treat the gang this hand was never slow.
What? You laugh as if you thought this pocket never held a sou;
I once was fixed as well, my boys, as any one of you.

"There, thanks, that's braced me nicely; God bless you one and all;
Next time I pass this good saloon I'll make another call.
Give you a song? No, I can't do that; my singing days are past;
My voice is cracked, my throat's worn out, and my lungs are going fast.

"I'll tell you a funny story, and a fact, I promise, too.
Say! Give me another whiskey, and I'll tell you what I'll do—
That I was ever a decent man not one of you would think;

But I was, some four or five years back. Say, give me another drink!

"Fill her up, Joe, I want to put some life into my frame—
Such little drinks to a bum like me are miserably tame;
Five fingers—there, that's the scheme—and corking whiskey, too.
Well, here's luck, boys, and landlord, my best regards to you.

"You've treated me pretty kindly and I'd like to tell you how
I came to be the dirty sot you see before you now.
As I told you, once I was a man, with muscle, frame and health,
And but for a blunder ought to have made considerable wealth.

"I was a painter—not one that daubed on bricks and wood,
But an artist, and for my age, was rated pretty good.
I worked hard at my canvas, and was bidding fair to rise,
For gradually I saw the star of fame before my eyes.

"I made a picture perhaps you've seen, 'tis called the 'Chase of Fame.'

It brought me fifteen hundred dollars and added to my name.
And then I met a woman—now comes the funny part—
With eyes that petrified my brain and sank into my heart.

"Why don't you laugh? 'Tis funny that the vagabond you see
Could ever love a woman, and expect her love for me;
But 'twas so, and for a month or two her smiles were freely given
And when her lovely lips touched mine, it carried me to heaven.

"Boys, did you ever see a girl for whom your soul you'd give,
With a form like Milo Venus, too beautiful to live;
With eyes that would beat the Koh-i-noor, and a wealth of chestnut hair?
If so, 'twas she, for there never was another half so fair.

"I was working on a portrait, one afternoon in May,
Of a fair-haired boy, a friend of mine, who lived across the way;
And Madeline admired it, and, much to my surprise,
She said she'd like to know the man who had such dreamy eyes.

"It didn't take long to know him, and before the month had flown
My friend had stole my darling, and I was left alone;
And ere a year of misery had passed above my head,
The jewel I had treasured so had tarnished and was dead.

"That's why I took to drink, boys. Why, I never saw you smile!
I thought you'd be amused, and laughing all the while.
Why, what's the matter, friend? There's a tear-drop in your eye,
Come, laugh like me; 'tis only babes and women that should cry.

"Say, boys, if you give me another whiskey I'll be glad,
And I'll draw right here a picture of the face that drove me mad.
Give me that piece of chalk with which you mark the baseball score—
You shall see the lovely Madeline upon the bar-room floor."

Another drink, and with chalk in hand, the vagabond began
To sketch a face that might well buy the soul of any man.
Then, as he placed another lock upon the shapely head,
With a fearful shriek, he leapt and fell across the picture—dead.

THE GILA MONSTER ROUTE

HERE is an important item in the tramp troubadour's repertory. Not only is the poem rich in the phraseology of the road, but it describes a dramatic situation well known to every seasoned hobo. At times the piece rises to splendid heights—the sheer beauty of ". . . she flittered by like a frightened ghost," and the fine terseness of the third stanza. There is no finer example of hobo poetry than "The Gila Monster Route" (pronounced "Hee-la," by the way), and it finds appreciative audiences in jail and jungle alike.

The lingering sunset across the plain
Kissed the rear-end of an east-bound train,
And shone on a rusty track close by
Where a ding-bat sat on a rotten tie.

He was ditched by the shack and cruel fate.
The con high-balled, and the manifest freight
Pulled out on the stem behind the mail,
And she hit the ball on a sanded rail.

As she pulled away in the fading night
He could see the gleam of her red tail-light.

Then the moon arose and the stars came out—
He was ditched on the Gila Monster Route.

Nothing in sight but sand and space;
No chance for a bo to feed his face;
Not even a house to beg for a lump,
Nor a hen house there to frisk for a gump.

He gazed far out on the solitude;
He dropped his head and began to brood;
He thought of the time he lost his mate
In a hostile burg on the Nickel Plate.

They had piped the stem and threw their feet,
And speared four-bits for something to eat;
But deprived themselves of daily bread
And sluffed their coin for dago red.

Down by the track in the jungle's glade,
In the cool green grass, in the tules' shade,
They shed their coats and ditched their shoes
And tanked up full on that colored booze.

Then they took a flop with their hides plumb full,
And they did not hear the harness bull,
Till he shook them out of their boozy nap,
With a husky voice and a loaded sap.

They were charged with vag, for they had no kale,
And the judge said, "Sixty days in jail."
But the john had a bindle—a worker's plea,—
So they gave him a floater and set him free.

They had turned him out, but ditched his mate,
So he glommed the guts of an east-bound freight.
He had held his form to a rusty rod,
Till he heard the shack say, "Hit the sod!"

The john rolled off, he was in the ditch,
With two switch lamps and a rusty switch—
A poor old, seedy, half-starved bo
On a hostile pike, without a show.

From away off somewhere in the dark
Came the sharp, short notes of a coyote's bark.
The bo looked round and quickly rose
And shook the dust from his threadbare clothes.

Far off in the west through the moonlit night
He saw the gleam of a big head-light—
An east-bound stock run hummed the rail;
It was due at the switch to clear the mail.

As it pulled up close, the head-end shack
Threw the switch to the passing track.

The stock rolled in and off the main.
The line was clear for the west-bound train.

As she hove in sight far up the track,
She was working steam, with her brake shoes slack,
She whistled once at the whistling post,
Then she flittered by like a frightened ghost.

He could hear the roar of the big six-wheel,
As the drivers pounded on the polished steel,
And the screech of the flanges on the rail
As she beat it west o'er the desert trail.

The john got busy and took the risk,
He climbed aboard and began to frisk,
He reached up high and began to feel
For an end-door pin—then he cracked the seal.

'Twas a double-decked stock-car, loaded with sheep.
Old john crawled in and went to sleep.
The con highballed, and she whistled out—
They were off, down the Gila Monster Route.

THE GIRL IN THE BLUE VELVET BAND

"THE Girl in the Blue Velvet Band" is a contemporary of "The Face on the Barroom Floor" and "Toledo Slim," and it vies with those two selections in popularity. Hobo elocutionists are still declaiming it in the bullpens. According to tradition its author died in San Quentin.

In that city of wit, wealth and fashion,
Known as 'Frisco, where I first saw the light,
And the many frolics that I had there
Are fresh in my memory tonight.

One evening, while out for a ramble,
Walking here or there without thought or design
I chanced on a girl, tall and slender,
On the corner of Kearney and Pine.

On her cheeks was the pure flush of nature,
And her dark eyes seemed to expand,
While her hair in rich, brilliant masses
Was entwined in a blue velvet band.

To a house aptly called the "Four Corners,"
She invited me with a sweet smile;

She seemed so refined, gay and charming
That I thought I would tarry a while.

She then shared with me a collection
Of wines of an excellent brand,
And conversed in polite conversation,
Did this girl in the blue velvet band.

After lunch, to a well-kept apartment,
We adjourned to a room up above;
While I thought myself surely in heaven
Where reigneth the goddess of love.

A fine lady's taste seemed apparent
By the dainty arrangement of things,
From the ornaments so charming
To the little white Cupid in wings.

But the object that most struck my fancy
Was the work of some artistic hand
'Twas the costly layout of a dope fiend—
That fiend wore a blue velvet band.

The pipe it was carved out of ivory,
With rubies inlaid round the bowl;
The lamp was a masterpiece of ornament,
While the yen-hoke was made of pure gold.

I sought a pile of pillows and cushions,
While she cooked the hop so grand;
And we both hit the pipe until slumber
Overtook the eyes of my blue velvet band.

It was just a sweet dream of happiness
That lasted a year or so,
And by her advice and teaching
I had plenty of cloth and dough.

She taught me the confidence racket
And no equal had I as a dip;
I could get the rocks from their mountings,
With never a slide or slip.

From opium smoking to stealing
My downfall she artfully planned;
That's why I tell you young fellows,
Stay away from the blue velvet band.

One evening, coming home wet and dreary,
With swag from a jewelry store
I heard someone and my dearie
Talking love as I came near the door.

"If you'll give me a clue to convict him,"
Said a strange tone soft and bland,
"I'll know for sure that you love me."
"That's a go," said my blue velvet band.

Oh, what rage filled my heart as I listened,
How false seemed all women and vile;
To think that once I adored her,
Makes a grim mockery of smile.

All ill-gotten gains we had squandered,
And my life was hers to command;
Betrayed and deserted for another—
Could this be my blue velvet band?

Just an hour before that I had been hunted
By the bulls who had wounded me, too,
And my temper was none of the sweetest
As I swung myself into their view.

And the cop, not liking the glitter
Of the .44 Colt in my hand,
Took a dive through the window and left me
Alone with my blue velvet band.

What happened to me I will tell you,
I was ditched for a burgular's crime;
There was hell in a bank at midnight,
And my pal was cut off in his prime.

As a convict of hard reputation,
Ten years of hard grind I did land,
And I often thought of the pleasures
I had with my blue velvet band.

Oh, when this girl double-crossed me,
My life in steep bliss faded away,
That's when our purses grew empty,
She cunningly taught me to play.

Many years have passed since these happenings,
This story all belongs to the past;
I forgave her, but just retribution,
Claimed this fair but false one at last.

What ages of old have contended,
What is deemed best mortal can stand;
So the law, in a hop joint, ended
My romance with the blue velvet band.

One night when bedtime was ringing
I found myself close to the bars;
I thought I heard someone singing
Away out on the ocean of stars.

It had the same tone of sadness
I knew that but one could command,
It had that same thrill of gladness
As that of my blue velvet band.

One day the Superintendent addressed me
In his same good-natured way;
"Jack, let's take a trip Sunday to Potter's Field,
And there spend the day."

While gazing over the different tombstones,
A low slab caught my sight,
And the two words on it were unknown
And nearly covered from sight.

And there was the full description,
Even to the mole on her hand,
And my tears fell upon the pauper's grave,
'Twas that of my blue velvet band.

I listened as they told me the story
Of a raid one cold dark night,
In a hop joint on Dupoint Street,
And this girl had died from fright.

Some claimed that she grabbed the gun,
On her lover she laid the raid;
And he killed her, to keep her from talking,
Where the crooks and plotters had laid.

They said when she was dying,
She called one girl to her side
And murmured, "Tell Jack Leonard in Quentin,
My thoughts were on him when I died."

My face turned as white as my clothing,
And the blood froze in my veins;
My head started aching and throbbing,
And my heart was bursting with pain.

Now if I'm lucky I'll endeavor
To live honest in some other land,
And bid farewell to old 'Frisco,
And the grave of my blue velvet band.

"I'VE BEEN ALL AROUND THE WORLD"

This selection, set to a traditional mountain tune, is sometimes called "The Hobo's Lament." The first and second lines of each stanza should be repeated as indicated in the first stanza. The refrain should be mumbled, the words of an exhausted man.

Bring to me my supper, boys,
I'll eat her done or raw,
Bring to me my supper, boys,
I'll eat her done or raw,
For I haven't had a square meal
Since I left Arkansaw.

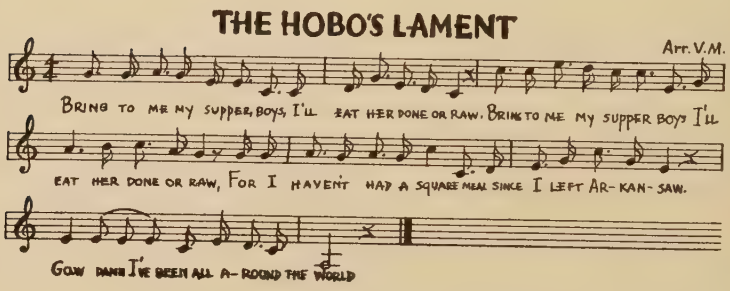
Refrain:

Gaw damn, I've been all around the world.

The railroad is finished, boys,
The cars is on the track,
You can take from me my baby,
But money will bring her back.

Come to me, my honey,
And I will pay your fine,
And each and all your troubles
I surely will make mine.

The bulls will never get me,
And I will tell you why,
For I'm going to wander
And travel till I die.


THE HOBO'S LAMENT
Arr. V.M.
BRING TO ME MY SUPPER, BOYS, I'LL EAT HER DONE OR RAW. BRING TO ME MY SUPPER BOYS I'LL
EAT HER DONE OR RAW, FOR I HAVENT HAD A SQUARE MEAL SINCE I LEFT AR-KAN-SAW.
GOLL DANG I'VE BEEN ALL A-ROUND THE WORLD

THE LITTLE RED GOD

LONG before that blunt little Anglo-Saxon monosyllable, *guts*, came to be a synonym for courage and fortitude in the American language, tramp elocutionists were reciting the following poem in barrooms up and down the land. Indeed, the present meaning of the word seems to derive from this source.

Here's a little red song to the god of guts,
Who dwells in palaces, brothels and huts;
The little red god with the craw of grit
The god who never learned how to quit.

He is neither a fool with a frozen smile,
Or a sad old toad in a cask of bile;
He can dance with a shoe-nail in his heel,
And never a sign of his pain reveal.

He can hold a mob with an empty gun
And turn a tragedy into fun;
Kill a man in a flash, a breath,
Or snatch a pal from the claws of death.

He can swallow the pill of assured defeat
And plan attack in his slow retreat;

Spin the wheel till the numbers dance,
And thumb his nose at the god of chance.

Drink straight water with whiskey-soaks,
Or call for liquor with temperance folks;
Tearless stand at the graven stone,
Yet weep in the silence of night, alone.

Worship a sweet, white virgin's glove,
Or teach a harlot how to love;
Dare the dullness of fireside bliss,
Or stake his soul for a wanton's kiss.

Blind his soul to a woman's eyes
When she says she loves and he knows she lies;
Shovel dung in the city mart
To earn a crust for his chosen art.

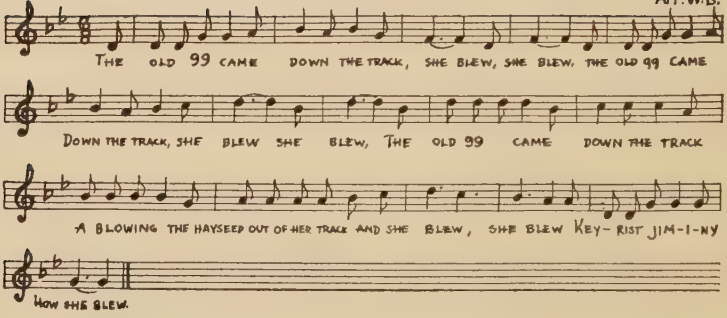
Build where the builders all have failed,
And sail seas no man has ever sailed;
Tell a pal what his work is worth,
Though he loses his last best friend on earth.

Wear the garments he likes to wear,
Never dream that people stare;
He is kind and gentle, or harsh and gruff;
He is tender as love—or he's rawhide tough.

And this is the little red god I sing,
Who cares not a damn for anything
That walks or runs, that crawls or struts,
No matter what—if it ain't got guts.

THE OLD 99

Arr. W.B.

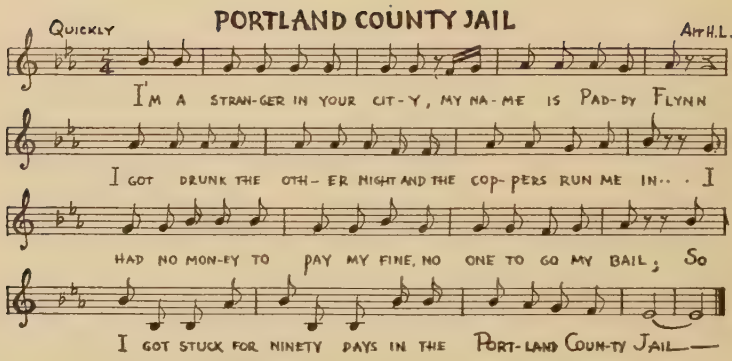

THE OLD 99 CAME DOWN THE TRACK, SHE BLEW, SHE BLEW, THE OLD 99 CAME
DOWN THE TRACK, SHE BLEW SHE BLEW, THE OLD 99 CAME DOWN THE TRACK
A BLOWING THE HAYSEED OUT OF HER TRACK AND SHE BLEW, SHE BLEW KEY-RIST JIM-I-NY
HOW SHE BLEW.

THE OLD 99

One of those formless railroad ballads similar to "The Wanderer's Blues," "The Old 99" has a large number of stanzas too vigorous for pallid print. I am obliged to Oliver LaFarge II for the original version, from which the following verses were taken. The tune is "When Johnny Comes Marching Home."

The old 99 came down the track,
  She blew, she blew,
The old 99 came down the track,
  She blew—

The old 99 came down the track,
A-blowing hayseed out of her stack,
  And she blew—
  Key-rist Jim-i-ny how she blew!


PORTLAND COUNTY JAIL
QUICKLY
ARTH.L.
I'M A STRAN-GER IN YOUR CIT-Y, MY NA-ME IS PAD-DY FLYNN
I GOT DRUNK THE OTH-ER NIGHT AND THE COP-PERS RUN ME IN... I
HAD NO MON-EY TO PAY MY FINE, NO ONE TO GO MY BAIL; SO
I GOT STUCK FOR NINETY DAYS IN THE PORT-LAND COUN-TY JAIL——

PORTLAND COUNTY JAIL

ANOTHER bums' ballad of extraordinary vitality, "Portland County Jail" will probably live on as a vagabond vestigial long after hoboes have vanished from the land. It dates from the Early Irish period in American letters.

I'm a stranger in your city,
  My name is Paddy Flynn;
I got drunk the other night,
  And the coppers run me in.
I had no money to pay my fine,
  No friends to go my bail
So I got soaked for ninety days
  In the Portland County Jail.

Oh, such a lot of devils,
  The like I never saw;
Robbers, thieves, and highwaymen,
  And breakers of the law.
They sang a song the whole night long,
  And the curses fell like hail,
I'll bless the day they take me away
  From the Portland County Jail.

The only friend that I had left
  Was Happy Sailor Jack;
He told me all the lies he knew,
  And all the safes he's cracked.
He cracked them in Seattle;
  He'd robbed the Western Mail;
It would freeze the blood of an honest man,
  In the Portland County Jail.

They said I was a lazy bum,
  And it may be what I am,
But just because I got tight
  They throwed me in the can
Along with yeggs and petermen—
  Oh, listen to 'em rail!
They would get away, for who cares to stay
  In the Portland County Jail?

THE RESTLESS ROVERS

THE same longing for new experiences motivates hoboes, soldiers of fortune and third cabin tourists. "I want to go places and see things!" is a cry on every tongue, but the hobo alone refuses to thwart his desire. The exhilarating spirit of wanderlust weaves through the poem below, and it is committed to memory by many jungle elocutionists.

We've loitered on wind-swept beaches,
  And we've shipped o'er the seven seas;
We've battled and clawed for nuggets
  In this land of the dirt-stained Crees.
You find us in Punta Arenas—
  In the flare of the Southern Cross,
And you see us on South Sea Islands,
  Where the white-bellied man-eaters toss.

You find us behind machine guns,
  And you find us with rifles in hand
A-leading the van of the armies
  Through glaciers or desert sand;
And sometimes you find us together,
  As the shadows of evening grow,

And the camp-fire slowly is dying
  E'er we shoulder our packs and go!

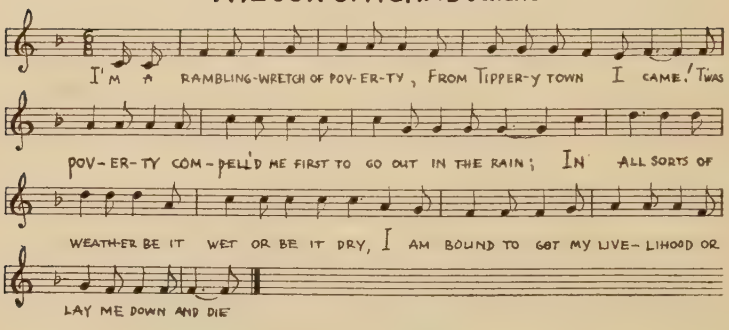
We've soldiered for many nations
  (And it's damn little thanks we got,)
Our bodies—they lie like carrion,
  In the midst of the jungle rot.
And sometimes we meet a comrade,
  In the places where roamers blow;
And we toss off a toast for a second—
  Then we hitch up our harness and go!

We live in the time of the present,
  In our love and our joy and our pain—
By gad, we've the souls of the pirates
  When they worried the Spanish Main;
The souls of the green-shirted archers
  When they fought in the middle age;
The souls of the iron-armored errants,
  When they struck for their lady's gage.

We come from all climates and nations—
  From the tropics and scrunching snows,
And sometimes it happens we're friendly,
  And again it occurs that we're foes.

But always down deep in our conscience
Is the feeling we come to know—
We are kin to the jeering cobbler,
And onward we ever must go!

THE SON OF A GAMBOLIER


I'M A RAMBLING-WRETCH OF POV-ER-TY, FROM TIPPER-Y TOWN I CAME. / TWAS
POV-ER-TY COM-PELL'D ME FIRST TO GO OUT IN THE RAIN; IN ALL SORTS OF
WEATH-ER BE IT WET OR BE IT DRY, I AM BOUND TO GET MY LIVE-LIHOOD OR
LAY ME DOWN AND DIE

THE SON OF A GAMBOLIER

THIS, probably, is the earliest hobo song. It has been relegated to college songbooks. The text indicates that it is of Irish origin.

I'm a rambling rake of poverty,
From Tippery town I came!
'Twas poverty compelled me first
To go out in the rain;
In all sorts of weather,
Be it wet or be it dry,
I am bound to get my livelihood
Or lay me down and die.

Chorus:

Then combine your humble ditties,
As from tavern to tavern we steer,
Like ev'ry honest fellow,
I likes my lager beer,
Like ev'ry jolly fellow,
I takes my whiskey clear,
I'm a rambling wretch of poverty,
And the son of a gambolier.

I once was tall and handsome,
And was so very neat,
They thought I was too good to live,
Most good enough to eat;
But now I'm old, my coat is torn,
And poverty holds me fast,
And every girl turns up her nose
As I go wandering past.

I'm a rambling rake of poverty,
From Tippery town I came.
My coat I bought from an old Jew shop,
Way down in Maiden Lane;
My hat I got from a sailor lad
Just eighteen years ago,
And my shoes I picked from an old dust heap,
Which everyone shunned but me.

THE STATE OF ARKANSAW

EVERY large city in the United States has a "slave market" where there are private employment agencies hiring vagrants for shipment to jobs at distant points. Usually the transportation is free, and a bum sometimes quits the job as soon as he has finished the ride.

My name is Stamford Barnes, I come from Nobleville
town;
I've travelled this wide world over, I've travelled this
wide world round.
I've met with ups and downs in life but better days I've
saw,
But I never knew what misery meant till I came to
Arkansaw.

I landed at St. Louis with ten dollars and no more;
I read the daily papers till both my eyes were sore;
I read them evening papers until at last I saw
Ten thousand men were wanted in the state of Arkan-
saw.

I wiped my eyes with great surprise when I read this
grateful news,

And straightway off I started to see the agent, Billy Hughes.
He says, "Pay me five dollars and a ticket to you I'll draw,
It'll land you safe upon the railroad in the state of Arkansaw."

I started off one morning a quarter after five;
I started from St. Louis, half dead and half alive;
I bought me a quart of whiskey my misery to thaw,
I got as tight as a biled owl when I left for Arkansaw.

I landed in Ft. Smith one sultry Sunday afternoon,
It was in the month of May, or early in the month of June,
Up stepped a walking skeleton with long and lantern jaw,
Invited me to his hotel, "The best in Arkansaw."

I followed my conductor into his dwelling place;
Poverty was depicted in his melancholy face.
His bread, it was corndodger, his beef I could not chaw;
This was the kind of hash they had in the State of Arkansaw.

I started off next morning to catch the morning train.
He says to me, "You'd better work, I have some land to drain.

I'll pay you fifty cents a day, your board, washing and all,—
You'll find yourself a different man when you leave Arkansaw."

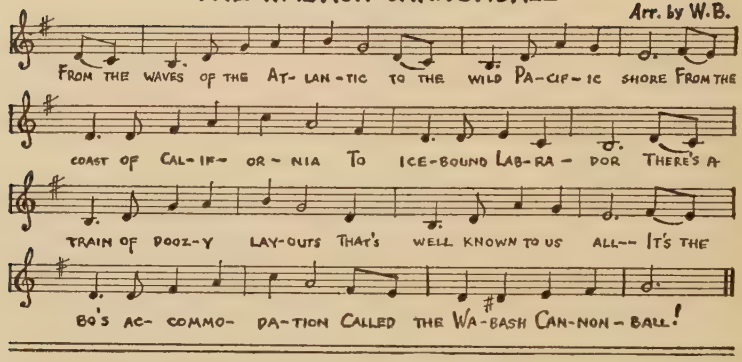
I worked six weeks for that son of a gun, Jess Herring was his name,
He was six foot seven in his stocking feet and scrawny as a crane;
His hair hung down in strings over his long and lantern jaw,—
He was a photograph of all the gents who lived in Arkansaw.

He fed me on corndodgers as hard as any rock,
Until my teeth began to loosen and my knees began to knock;
I got so thin on sassafras tea I could hide behind a straw,
And indeed I was a different man when I left old Arkansaw.

Farewell to swamp angels, cane brakes and chills;
Farewell to sage and sassafras and corndodger pills.
If I ever see this land again, I'll give to you my paw,
It will be through a telescope from here to Arkansaw.

THE WABASH CANNONBALL

Arr. by W.B.


FROM THE WAVES OF THE AT- LAN - TIC TO THE WILD PA- CIF- IC SHORE FROM THE
COAST OF CAL- IF- OR - NIA TO ICE-BOUND LAB-RA - DOR THERE'S A
TRAIN OF DOOZ-Y LAY-OUTS THAT'S WELL KNOWN TO US ALL-- IT'S THE
BO'S AC- COMMO- DA-TION CALLED THE WA-BASH CAN-NON - BALL!

THE WABASH CANNONBALL

THE Wabash Cannonball is for the hobo what the spectral "Flying Dutchman" is for the sailor. It is a mythical train that runs everywhere, and the ballad about it consists largely of stanzas enumerating its stops. The song has a haunting melody, and the lilt of this transforms the endless repetition of its theme.

From the waves of the Atlantic
To the wild Pacific shore;
From the coast of California
To ice-bound Labrador
There's a train of doozy layout
That's well-known to us all—
It's the 'boes' accommodation
Called the Wabash Cannonball.

Great cities of importance
We reach upon our way,
Chicago and St. Louis,
Rock Island—so they say—
Then Springfield and Decatur,
Peoria—above all—
We reach them by no other
But the Wabash Cannonball.

This train she runs to Quincy,
Monroe and Mexico,
She runs to Kansas City,
And she's never running slow;
She runs right into Denver
And she makes an awful squall;
They all know by that whistle
It's the Wabash Cannonball.

There are other cities, pardner,
That you can go to see;
St. Paul and Minneapolis,
Ashtabula, Kankakee;
The lakes of Minnehaha,
Where the laughing waters fall,
We reach them by no other
But the Wabash Cannonball.

Now listen to her ramble,
Now listen to her roar,
As she echoes down the valley
And tears along the shore.
Now hear the engine's whistle
And her mighty hoboes' call
As we ride the rods and brakebeams
On the Wabash Cannonball.

Now here's to Long Slim Perkins,
May his name forever stand;
He'll be honored and respected
By the boes throughout the land,
And when his days are over
And the curtains round him fall
We'll ship him off to hell and
On the Wabash Cannonball.*

* Who Long Slim Perkins was I have no way of knowing, but it may be that he was the 'bo who composed the original song. A ballad sometimes carries the name of its author in the final stanza, as in "Jesse James":

This song was made
By Billy Gashade
As soon as the news did arrive.
He said there was no man
With the law in his hand
Who could take Jesse James alive.

TOLEDO SLIM

NARRATIVE poems that treat with a crisis in the life of some character—providing an answer for the question, "Why is a hobo?"—are popular among the vagabond versifiers. The following recitation has many mates, and it is not dissimilar to the classic "Face on the Barroom Floor."

We were seated in a pool room on a cold December day,
Telling jokes and funny stories just to pass the time away;
When the door was softly opened and a form walked slowly in;
All the boys soon stopped their kidding when they saw Toledo Slim.

But a different man was he and they hardly knew the guy;
He no longer wore the glad rags he had worn in days gone by.
He took a look around him as he crept into the place,
And we saw a look of hunger on his dirty, grimy face.

"Hello, Slim, old bo!" said Boston Red; "you're looking on the pork;

Why, you used to be the swellest guy of any in New York.
Come, tell us, Slim, what happened that you are on the bum?"
The crowd then gathered 'round him and the story Slim begun.

" 'Tis true I'm on the bum, boys; I'm on the hog for fair,
But in the past I led them all, my roll was always there.
I never turned an old pal down, I spent my money free,
And all the sports along the line were glad to stick with me.

"I was an all 'round hustler, I trimmed the birdies right,
I never shied at any game when greenbacks were in sight.
But one night I met my fate; I fell like many more,
That's how I'm on the bum, boys, played out and feeling sore.

"It happened just five years ago, if I remember right,
I trimmed a sucker for a roll and felt most out of sight.
I took a stroll along the 'line'; 'set up' for all the boys,
And just to pass the time away I dropped in Kid McCoy's.

"And while I sat there drinking, getting on a mighty stew,
A dead swell frail came in the place and sat beside me, too.

I asked her if she'd have a drink, she sweetly said she would,
And as I gazed into her eyes, I thought I understood.

"Perhaps you'll think me fickle, 'bos, but it isn't any dream;
For when it came to doozy looks that 'Tommy' was a queen.
We chewed the rag for quite a while, I shot con for fair,
(And when it came to spreading salve, you may gamble I was there).

"I told her I would place her in a finely furnished flat,
And when the joint closed down that night I had my girlie pat.
Next day we saw the parson and paid a month's rent down,
And then she went a-hustlin' for work around the town.

"She'd get up in the morning, go out and get the grub,
While I lay in my downy bed, so doozy and so snug.
But if the day proved gloomy, then in the house we'd stop.
She'd gather 'round the lay-out while I cooked the fragrant hop.

"When winter drew around at last and things were going fine,

We had the swellest flat of any couple on the 'line.'

"One night I had a job to do, the richest home in town:
I got my tools and started out with my pal, Jackie Brown.
We never thought we'd get a blow, the thing looked like a pipe,
With all the folks a-sleeping and not a soul in sight.

"We put the goods into a sheet and started down the block,
And just as luck would have it, we bumped into a cop.
We dropped the swag quick as a flash and started on the run,
With the copper close behind us, a-shooting off his gun.

"But we were fleet as greyhounds and were halfway down the street
When a bullet hit me in the leg and I knew that I was beat.
The copper stopped to handcuff me while Jackie got away,
And I never saw his face again for many and many a day.

"Well, boys, I know you'll guess the rest; they made short work of me;
They sent me up the river to do my little 'V'!

But still I did not worry; I thought my girl would stick
And keep the flat a-going while I did my little trick.

"At last the long years passed away and one bright summer day
I started back to old New York so happy and so gay.
But when I reached my little flat I found my girl had flown—
She had run away with Jackie and left me all alone.

"It was then I took to boozing and went from bad to worse.
I tried to drown my sorrow and forget the bitter curse,
But my memory of that pretty face was always on my mind,
So I searched the city, but no trace of her could find.

"I roamed the streets at leisure seeking vainly for my prey,
Looking for the man that ruined me and stole my girl away.

"I swore that I'd have his life for the trick that he had done,
So I searched the country everywhere, knowing well my time would come.
One day I met a wise guy who knew my pal full well,

He said he was in 'Frisco and living mighty swell.
"The girl had died in Denver of consumption, so he said,

Where my former pal had left her to starve from want of bread.
It happened at a time, boys, when I didn't have a cent,
So I beat my way to 'Frisco with my mind on vengeance bent.

"One foggy day on Market Street I met him sure as fate;
He tried to get the drop on me, but was a moment late.
I sent a bullet crashing into the traitor's brain,
And then I made my getaway and glommed an eastbound train.

"That's all there is to tell, boys: I'm like the other bums.
I've lost all my ambition and don't care what becomes—"
And as he finished talking, from his hip he drew a gun.
In a moment came a sharp report—his grafting days were done.

THE TROPICS' CURSE

By the time a hobo reaches New Orleans he is no longer a hobo—he is a beachcomber. He finds occasional work as a banana loader, he panhandles from tourists in Vieux Carré, he drinks dago red, and he eats red beans and rice at Martin's in the French Market. Here is a beachcomber's recitation, the inner rhymes of which have a swinging fascination for the hobo ear.

You've decided to come to the tropics,
Heard that all you had to do
Was to sit in the shade of a cocoanut glade
And let the dollars roll in to you.

You got that line down at the bureau.
Have you got your statistics straight?
Well, hear what it did to another kid
Before you settle your fate.

You don't go down with a sharp, hard fall,
You just sort of shuffle along,
And sluff off your load of the moral code
Till you don't know right from wrong.

I started in to be honest,
With everything on the square;
But a guy can't fool with the Golden Rule
In a mob that won't play fair.

'Twas a case of riding a crooked race,
Or being an also ran;
My only hope was to sneak and dope
The horse of the other man.

I pulled a deal in Guayaquil,
In an Inca silver mine;
And before they found it was salted ground,
I was safe in Argentine.

But the thing that'll double-bar my soul,
When it flaps at heaven's doors,
Was peddling booze to the Santa Cruz
And Winchester forty-fours.

Made unafraid by my hellish aid,
The drink-crazed brutes came down
And left a blazing, quivering mass
Of a flourishing border town.

I then took charge of a smuggler's barge,
Down the coast from Yucatan;
But she went to hell off Christobel
One night in a hurricane.

I got to shore on a broken oar,
In the filthy, shrieking dark,
While the other two of that ship's crew
Were converted into shark.

From a sun-scorched cliff I flagged a skiff
With a salt-soaked pair of jeans;
Then worked my way, for I couldn't pay,
On a fruiter to New Orleans.

It's a kind of a habit, the tropics.
It gets you worse than rum;
You get away and swear you'll stay,
But they call and back you'll come.

Six short months went by before
I was back there on the job,
Running a war in Salvador
With a barefoot, black-faced mob.

A mob that made me general,
Leading a grand revolt,
And my only friend from start to end
Was a hair-triggered army Colt.

I might have been their president,
A prosperous man of means,
But a gunboat came and spoiled my game
With a hundred or so marines.

So I awoke from my dream dead broke,
And drifted from bad to worse;
And sank as low as a man can go,
Gripped firm by the tropics' curse.

But stars, they say, appear by day
When you are down in the deep, dark pit;
My lucky star found me that way
When I was about to quit.

Alone on a hot, flea-ridden cot,
I was down with the yellowjack;
Out of my head and damn near dead—
She found me and brought me back.

In her eyes shone lights of empires gone,
For hers was the blood of kings.
When she spoke, her voice inspired high thoughts
And dreams of nobler things.

Then the devil sent his right hand man.
I might have suspected he would;
And he took her life with a long thin knife,
Because she was pure and good.

Within me died hope, honor and pride,
And all but a primitive will
To track him down on his blood-red trail
And find and slash—and kill!

O'er chicle camps and logwood swamps,
I hunted him many a moon;
Then I found my man in a long pit pan,
At the edge of a blue lagoon.

The chase was o'er at the farther shore.
It ended a three-year quest.
And I left him there with an empty stare,
And a knife stuck in his chest.

You see those marks upon my arm?
You wonder what they mean?
Those marks were left by fingers deft
Of my girl friend—Miss Morphine.

You say that habit's no worse than rum?
It's possible, too, you're right,
But at least it drives away the things
That come and stare at night.

There's a homestead down in an old Maine town,
And there's lilacs 'round the gate,
And the night winds whisper, "It might have been,"
But the truth has come too late.

For whenever you play, whatever the way,
For stakes that are large or small,
The curse of the tropics gathers it in,
And the dealer gets it all.

THE WHISTLE IN THE NIGHT

No invention of the machine age has assumed the glamour and mysterious charm that attaches to the railroad train. Myriad railroad ballads give evidence of this. There is a malady closely akin to sea fever which periodically attacks the man who has forsaken the wanderer's life and none but a strong heart can withstand it. The following poem, by T. V. Barnett, expresses the poignant summons a train whistle may bring.

There's a lonely water tower and a pale moon shining down,
There's a warm and cheery sand-house in a railroad junction town;
There's a lumber-loaded freight train puffing up a desert grade
With hot wheels in the noontime whanging out their serenade;
There's a fire crackling cheerfully beside the right of way,
While over all is the purple haze that mourns the dying day—
Oh, the old and stirring pictures that flame up clear and bright

When I hear a distant freight train go whistling through
the night.

There's magic in its mournful wail—I can see the head-
light gleam
Around the cut, then down the gorge, across the hidden
stream;
I can feel the hollow rumble of the heavy, pounding
train
With coachtops dully glowing in a pouring midnight
rain;
I can hear the clang of a cross-roads bell and catch the
signal flash
And smell the stinging, acrid smoke that chokes the
rocky gash;
There's a fleeting glimpse of a farmhouse with windows
scared and white
All these sweep by whenever I hear a whistle in the night.

A sailor who's gone down in ships and now is fast ashore,
He never hears the sea moan but he longs to sail once
more;
A rover who has flung his pack and settled down to
stay,
He never sees an arrow west but he wants to go away.
To some the ties say, "Travel on"; to others "Travel
back,"
But pity the one to whom the ties are just a railroad
track.

His heart is cold and his blood is thin, though years on
him are light,
He'll never feel the pull of a train that whistles in the
night.

VII. "PACKING THE BANNER"

THE BUM

Arturo Giovannitti, an Italian immigrant, is a poet well-known among hoboes. His blank verse poem, "The Walker," written in jail, has been included in many anthologies, and is responsible for his literary reputation. His lesser known poem, "The Bum," the first three stanzas of which follow, has been widely memorized by hoboes.

The dust of a thousand roads, the grease
  And grime of slums, were on his face;
The fangs of hunger and disease
  Upon his throat had left their trace;
The smell of death was in his breath,
  But in his eye no resting place.

Along the gutters, shapeless, fagged,
  With drooping head and bleeding feet,
Throughout the Christmas night he dragged,
  His care, his woe, and his defeat;
Till, gasping hard with face downward
  He fell upon the trafficked street.

The midnight revelry aloud
  Cried out its glut of wine and lust,

The happy, clean, indifferent crowd
  Passed him in anger and disgust:
For—fit or rum—he was a bum,
  And if he died 'twas nothing lost.

HASH

The hobo poet has a way of singing about what he knows best. He has his feet on the ground and he draws on his experience rather than on his imagination. "Hash," an opus from Bill Quirke's pen, is the result of such an attitude.

It was in one of them "Come in Stranger" joints
  That sure do a lot of good,
Where they give you a bed and a bowl of soup
  For sawing a cord of wood

That I heard that talk of the Infinite
  (There was four of us in the yard,
And our hands were raw and our stomachs flat,
  For that hickory wood was hard).

Well, the hoss-faced guy and his Infinite
  Was all that we got to chew
While waiting for the chicory, beans and pork,
  And with nothin' else to do,

But to listen to one fed stomach talk
  About the future of our souls,

And we knew we couldn't sass him back
Or we'd lose our breakfast rolls.

And he made us feel or tried to make
Us feel sorry that we was born,
And I happened to recollect as how
The Disciples swiped the corn,

As they needed it along the way,
Bein' hungry as all folks get,
And I kinder got sore on that hoss-face guy
For his sayin's they didn't set

Any too good on my empty stomach then;
And I reckon I got too rash,
And I says, "Nix, 'bo, on the Infinite,
What we're needin' most is hash."

It came damn hard to give up our grub,
But Toledo Blake and I,
We beat it then while the others stayed
And ate with that hoss-faced guy.

We braced a gent on the downtown side,
And told him our story straight,
He didn't yap for a dick, but grinned
And I liked his style first rate.

It was coffee and ham and potatoes fried
And eggs and some real French rolls.
Thinks I, "How are hungry guys to know
That God ever gave them souls?"

Did you ever bump into Tim Sullivan,
With the vest like a yellow splash?
Well, he don't go much on the Infinite,
But say, he knows Hash is Hash.

A HOBO'S SAD STORY

THE following lachrymose narrative appeared first in the *Hobo News,* and it was signed by Eugene Lester.

Folks, listen to my story,
I've got a tale to tell,
Not of the old Sahara desert
Where the sun shines hot as hell,

But of this great big city,
Where the lights are burning bright
And the snow and sleet is slashing
The window panes at night.

For many days I've roamed the streets
Without a bite to eat.
I've been abused and hounded by
Each cop upon his beat.

I've slept on benches in the park,
Gee, life has been some grind;
The guys I helped when I had coin
Are treating me unkind.

'Twas near the Biltmore one cold night
A rich gazabo stood.
The guy looked at me with a sneer—
Seemed to be made of wood.

He brushed me by, stepped in his car
And quickly drove away,
I suppose to blow dough lavishly
Along the Great White Way.

At last a swell young fellow
Stopped at my feeble call,
And listened to my chatter
As bitter, friends, as gall.

"I'm not a professional beggar
That always live off men
But only a broken down toiler
And desperate now and then.

"Last year I reaped the harvest
To give such as you your bread;
I toiled hard in the blistering sun
Till I nearly dropped dead.

"I needed a job bad, stranger,
So I came to this big town,
But the men I slaved for in summer
Are the ones that turn me down.

"Of course there's lots of fellows
Roamin' round these streets
Lookin' for work in thousands
With nothing at all for eats."

"I see," finally spoke the stranger;
"I'll give you coin, you think,
And you'll sneak around the corner
And buy yourself a drink."

His unkind words just staggered me,
And sunk deep in my brain.
At last I braced up just a bit
And spoke up once again.

"I beg your pardon, stranger,
I think I asked for food,
And to the best of my knowledge,
I don't think I was rude."

"I've often heard that story,"
Said the stranger with a grin,
And calling a policeman
Said, "Take this fellow in."

Next day I got a sentence,
Thirty long days in jail;
It was to a big bull in town
I had told my hard luck tale.

In this great land of freedom,
A poor man can't roam at will;
Just a land where the working hobo
Must pay the rich man's bill.

HUNGRY MAN'S CANYON

THERE is something final and definitive about the following hobo inscription, scrawled on the walls of a depot outhouse in a Kansas village.

Oh, my belly is just achin'
For a couple of strips of bacon,
A hunk of punk and a little pot of brew.
I'm tired of the scenery,
Just lead me to a beanery,
Where there's something more than air to chew.

MEN OF THE STEM

THIS poem was clipped from the August, 1921, *Hobo News,* a radical monthly once popular on the stem, but now defunct. The author, Charles Thornburn, sets down his observations as a bystander on the stem.

With ever restless tread, they come and go,
  Or lean intent against the grimy wall,
These men whom fate has battered to and fro,
  In the grim game of life, from which they all
Have found so much of that which is unkind,
  Still hoping on, that fortune yet may mend,
With sullen stare, and features hard and lined,
  They wander off to nowhere, and the end.

Their thoughts we may not fathom, in their eyes
  One seems to sense a vision, as though fate
Had let one little glimpse of fairer skies
  Brighten their souls before she closed the gate.
Yet have they hopes and dreams which bring them peace,
  Adding to life's flat liquor just the blend
Called courage, that their efforts may not cease
  To seek the gold, hid at the rainbow's end.

THE MOOCHER

R. W. GINTER, who runs a news stand in the Oklahoma City terminal building, has been memorizing ballads for thirty-five years. The following narrative is from his collection. Its author is John S. Hoare, Jr., one of Ginter's numerous hobo correspondents.

A ragged bum from Syracuse
Met a 'bo from New Orleans
On the streets of staid old Boston
Where the people eat the beans.

Said the 'bo from Syracuse
To the bum from southern clime,
"I wonder if you've ever asked
A harness bull for a dime.

"To string with me you gotta be
A moocher that's boo coo,
A guy what broaches anyone—
Let's see what you can do."

The hobo from New Orleans
Said, "I can show you how.

I've worked this racket twenty years —
You're in fast company now.

"I mooch the Eagles, Elks and Moose,
The Masons and K.P.'s,
The White, the Black, the Yellow race,
The Woodmen and K.C.'s."

He stepped before a copper
Who wore a gathered brow.
And this is what the hobo said,
And just exactly how:

"Pray, sir, I would petition you
For a thin and humble dime,
You're listening to a gentleman
From the balmy southern clime.

"These garments, soiled and badly rent,
Were classy once, I vow;
Think not that I'm a fugitive,
Though I look like one right now.

"In youth I was quite handsome
And my mother's pride and joy;
I know she prays for me tonight—
Her broken, wayward boy.

"Yes, I'm somebody's baby,
The youngest, sir, of ten,
Five of us are women,
And five of us are men.

"The other nine are model,
Not one has gone astray,
Behold in me the black sheep—
The wreck you see today.

"Excuse me, sir, for weeping,
Somehow I want to cry,
When memory takes me backward
To the happy days gone by.

"I see myself in childhood,
So beautiful and clean,
When life was but an endless song,
All holy and serene.

"But Fate is but a tyrant,
And Destiny a bum,
Both have turned a trick on me
And now I am a crumb.

"I might have been a genius
Whose name the world should know,
If the gods had only willed it,
And if Fate decided so.

"But that, you say, is hokum,
The favorite retreat
Of weakest men and women
Who accept their own defeat.

"We'll have no disputation
Upon that trifling score
For the only thing that's vital
Is that I eat some more.

"Oh, I know it's not conventional
To mooch a cop in blue,
But I thought you were a fireman—
I apologize to you.

"For me you hold no terror
With that star upon your breast,
For your face is good and kindly—
So different from the rest.

"In my extensive travels
To the corners of the earth,
I have learned to analyze a man,
His failings and his worth.

"I saw in you, your eyes of blue,
All things both good and grand,

And felt that you would surely lend
A 'bo a helping hand."

The policeman from his budge
Drew forth a goodly sum,
And with his fondest wishes
He gave it to the bum.

And when these two had parted
The copper gave a thought
To the hobo's woeful story
And the prank that Fate had wrought.

"Too bad," thought he, "that birds like him
Must stand out in the cold,
So full of derail hooch and all
The dingbat stuff that's sold."

While the hobo to his partner said,
"Not everyone can pull
The ancient, wet-eyed mooch act
On a big and husky bull."

POLICE PREROGATIVES

WHEN a vagrant is picked up for "investigation" the questioning begins even before he is officially taken into custody. This one-sided catechism is so invariable that the hobo has no trouble in committing it to memory. The following was printed in the *Hobo News* for June, 1921.

Where you goin'?
When was you born?
When, why and how?
What jail was you in last?
Come clean or I'll beat up on you till you tell.
I think I'll turn the hose on you.
Ain't you got any money?
I'll put you over the road if I have to frame you.
Did you ever steal?
You bet you did.
You'd kill a man in the dark.
You're one o' them bulsheviki.
You're runnin' 'round gettin' this country on the bum.
Don't talk back to me.
I'll knock yer block off.
I knew you'd not go far before we got you.

What's your religion?
You've been ridin' around beatin' the railroads for months.
Robbing the country.
You've got a prison haircut.
A convict's face!
Tell me the last pen you was in.
Before I knock your ribs in.
I'll show you.
Hello, 2005—the Hoosegow?
Send the hustlebuggy.

SWEET CHARITY

EVEN the mission soup line has its rigours. A dialect number from the repertory of Jim Seymour.

Come, cheer up, pal, it's nearly ten,
  De door'll soon be open;
We'll git a bowl o' Javy den—
  Leastwise dat's wot I'm hopin'—
And dat'll make us good and warm,
  Jes' wot we been a-wishin';
It's cold and wet here in de storm,
  But all right in de mission.

Now don't say dat, I know it's hard
  To stand on de Bowery
Since seven in de mornin', pard,
  In wedder cold and showery;
I know it hurts to read dat sign:
  "Come 8 a. m. for luncheon,"
But better stand t'ree hours in line
  Dan come too late fer munchin'.

At las' deir're open—half pas' ten—
  Come lean on me—dat's better.

Jes' squeeze in twixt dem bigger men
And don't get any wetter.
Come now, brace up, we'll soon be in—
Don't give dat bloke no 'spicion;
He'll t'ink yer drunk, as sure as sin,
An' chase yoose from de mission.

Now see? We're in; sit closer, mate;
We'll soon be warm and eatin'.
Wot's dat he says? Aw hell, dat's great!
"We'll first have noonday meetin',"
Dat means a couple of hours or more
Before we get our chewin',
But dere's no use in gettin' sore,
Dat's wot deir always doin'.

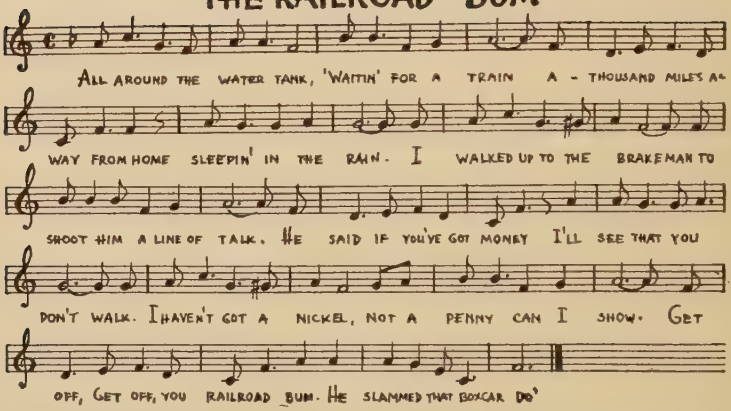
Now listen, 'bo, dey're goin' to preach
And tell us 'bout de Savior;
It's mighty nice, dem t'ings dey teach
'Bout keepin' good behavior,
But it seems to me, from wot I've read
'Bout Christ and bread and fishes,
Dat first he'd have us bums all fed
And den we'd heed his wishes.

Hear wot dat lady says here, 'bo:
Dat Christ fer us is weepin'.
Come tell us now, yoose didn't know—

But say de poor kid's sleepin'.
Well, let him sleep, he needs it sure,
T'ree nights he's packed the banner.
Aw God, it's hell to be so poor
And live in such a manner.

But now dey've stopped deir righteous spiel;
De bread and coffee's ready,
At last we're goin' to git our meal—
Come shake yerself some, Freddy!
But say, he's stiff—dere's hell to pay!
De poor kid's dead, not sleepin'—
Well, one poor soul has got away—
No wonder Christ is weepin'.

THE RAILROAD BUM


All around the water tank, 'Waitin' for a train A - thousand miles a-
way from home sleepin' in the rain. I walked up to the brakeman to
shoot him a line of talk. He said if you've got money I'll see that you
don't walk. I haven't got a nickel, not a penny can I show. Get
off, Get off, you railroad bum. He slammed that boxcar do'

THE RAILROAD BUM

I HAVE this from a beachcomber who sang it in a New Orleans riverfront saloon. He sang it in a plaintive, husky voice, and when he had finished he passed his hat. The song seems designed especially for panhandling.

All around the water tank
Waitin' for a train,
A thousand miles away from home,
Sleepin' in the rain.

I walked up to the brakeman
To shoot him a line of talk.
He says, "If you've got money
I'll see that you won't walk."

"I haven't got a nickel,
Not a penny can I show."
"Get off, get off, you railroad bum."
He slammed that boxcar do'.

Nobody seems to want me.
Or give me a helping hand.
I'm on my way from 'Frisco,
Just getting back to Dixie land.

Now, boys, I'm in your city,
I'm trying to do what's right;
Don't think cause I'm a railroad bum
That I am out for fight.

My pocket book is empty,
My heart is full of pain,
A thousand miles away from home,
I'll swing that next freight train.

"THEY CAN'T DO THAT"

THE hobo is not long in learning that, so far as the rights of man are concerned, protectors of the commonweal can do about what they please, and the following hobo recitation is a sardonic commentary on a familiar experience.

When you've just been framed by an upright judge
  For a ten year jolt or so
For a job that was done by another gun,
  And you weren't in on the dough—
And you tell some bo as you leave the court
  How they framed you and left you flat,
Now don't it make you sore as hell
  When he says, "They can't do that!"

They slough you in a lousy, rotten cell
  In the dear old county jail,
And a lawyer comes and shakes you down
  For the last jit of your kale.
And a fly-ball comes and drags you out
  And fans you with a loaded bat—
And then some guy in the old bull pen
  Says, "Bo, they can't do that!"

Then you start your hitch in the crummy stir
With the numbers on your back,
And jump and dodge to the yell of a screw
As you walk the narrow track;
Just beef because you get the slum
When the cream goes to some rat,
And some poor simp with the brains of a louse
Will pipe, "They can't do that!"

Now when my hitch on this earth is o'er,
And I start my jolt in hell,
I hope they peg each and every guy
That ever made that yell;
And as they stand on the red hot coals
An' sizzle in their own thick fat,
I want to stand by the devil's side
And yell, "They can't do that!"

VIII. THE ROAD

AWAY FROM TOWN *

During the winter the hobo "bugs up" in the city, but with the first harbinger of spring the surge of wanderlust catches him again and sweeps him away to shady jungle glades. Harry Kemp, a famous tramp poet, describes this urge in the poem below.

High perched upon a box-car, I speed, I speed today;
I leave the gaunt, gray city some good, green miles away,
A terrible dream in granite, a riot of streets and brick
Such is the frantic nightmare of people until the soul turns sick—

Such is the high, gray city with the live green waters 'round
Oozing up from the Ocean, slipping in from the Sound.
I'd put in the Bowery for nights in a ten-cent bed
Where the dinky "L" trains thunder and rattle overhead;
I'd traipsed the barren pavements with pain of frost in my feet;
I'd sidled to hotel kitchens and asked for something to eat.

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But when the snow went dripping, and the young spring
came as one
Who weeps because of winter, laughs because of the sun,
I thought of a limpid brooklet that bickers through
weeds all day,
And I made a streak for the ferry, and rode across in a
dray,
And dodged into Erie where they bunt the box-cars
round.
I peeled my eye for detectives, and boarded an outward
bound.
For you know when a man's been cabined in walls for
part of a year,
He longs for a place to stretch in, he hankers for country
cheer.

THE BINDLE STIFF

THE subject of this poem is one of those human paradoxes, a tramp who refuses to forswear his comfort. Wherever he goes he carries with him his bedding, seldom more than a tattered quilt or a sleazy gray blanket—in the hobo argot, his "bindle" or "balloon." Even in the world of misfits the bindle stiff is regarded as an odd type, and for this reason, quite as much as for its sentimental appeal, the following poem is a jungle favourite.

"The Western trail is a-gettin' dim;
The sage brush seems unreal;
My insides 're weak and gettin' slim,
Sure wisht I had a meal.

"My feet are growin' weary;
My head is hangin' low;
My eyes are lookin' teary,
Gawd! but it's hard to go.

"There's two thousand ties to a mile,
And fifty more miles to go.
I've counted these ties with a smile,
Keeps time from goin' so slow.

"Now they seem a mile apart.
I can't help feelin' cold.
Got an achin' down around my heart—
I guess I'm gittin' old.

"Know what the gang's a-doin' now,
Way down in Elephant Slough?—
They're sittin' round a can o' chow,
Helpin' themselves tuh stew.

"I kid myself I ain't et fer a week,
But I know it's a dang sight more.
My throat is dry—my insides squeak,
I'm hungry—clean to the core.

"I ain't the kind that'll stop to yell
When bad luck comes my way;
I've lived and sinned, I'm bound for hell,
But—guess I'll kneel and pray."

The bo got down on rough worn ties;
Lifted his head in prayer,
And knelt there pleading to the skies—
A whistle sounded through the air.

The hobo heard and tried to rise,
Saw the train coming fast.
His muscles failed, and from the ties
He welcomed this—the last.

"It's only a bindle stiff ye hit—
Sent another bum to hell.
Had I better report on it?
I guess I might as well."

"No, Con, don't make out no report—
Let's plant him by the steel.
The bum's bound for an unknown port,
And tracks will make it real."

The western trail is getting black,
It's time we moved along.
They buried him beside the track—
The hot western wind for the psalm.

The bo woke up in a nice white gown;
Clean, just like he'd had a bath.
Instead of the ties that held him down,
He followed a golden path.

THE BOOMER'S BLUES

When a hobo ballad mentions the fair sex and love, it can usually be spotted as a homeguard interpolation. The materials for genuine hobo ballads are varied and colourful enough without females to complicate the narrative. The following song, however, yoldeled to jazzy strains from harmonica and Jew's-harp, provides an entertaining and altogether wholesome exception to the rule.

Mob up and flop down around me,
Punch wind with an old-time 'bo;
Got some info to give you,—
Few things you oughta know.

Take a tip from a bird that's been there,
Never start to ramblin' 'round,
Pretty soon you get the fever,
Never want to settle down.

Met a little broad in 'Frisco,
Ast her to be my storm and strife,
Told her that I's tired of ramblin',
Said I'd settle down for life.

Just then I heard a whistle blowin',
I knew it was a Red Ball freight,
I left her standin' by the railroad,
Swingin' on the depot gate.

Wandered up and down this country,
Guess I've rambled everywhere,
Been on every branchline and main stem,
And never paid a nickel fare.

I been from Maine to California,
From Canada to Mexico,
Never tried to save no money,
Now I guess I better blow.

Remember this boomer's story,
Remember the things I say,
Hear another train a-comin,'
Have to be gettin' on my way.

If you want to do me a favor
When I lay me down and die,
Plant my bones by the main stem
So I can hear the trains go by—
So I can hear the trains go by!

FLIPPING A FREIGHT

ALTHOUGH it may have been repeated countless times, flipping a freight always remains an exciting procedure, and even the old-time floater never seems immune to the joy there is in boarding a fast-moving box-car. A rigidity comes over one, the heart beats quickly, breathing is strained, and relaxation does not come until one is safely aboard. This feeling has been caught by Budd L. McKillips in a poem that appeared in *The Smokehouse Monthly* under the title, "Nocturne in a Railroad Yard."

The Red Ball's throaty whistle
  Booms its way across the plain,
And its headlight cuts the darkness
  Through the drivin', sleety rain.

"Looks like she's going to ramble—
  Can we make it on the run?"
Them's the thoughts we both are thinkin',
  And our feet weight like a ton.

We been ditched since early mornin'—
  Tried to deck the Prairie Mail,
And we hit the grit a-flyin'
  With a shack right on our tail.

All day long we hugged a shanty—
  Didn't dare to mooch a lump—
Why the hell 'd they go and ditch us
  Hungry in a horstile dump?

Down the track the Red Ball's coming,
  Rollin', rockin'—it don't seem
Like she means to stop for water—
  Listen to her workin' steam!

Now she's hootin' loud for signals—
  Atta boy! They're showin' red!
Means she holes for somethin' comin'—
  Don't rush out there! Use you head!

Rattle! Pound! She's started driftin';
  Now you hear a million squeals,
And the sparks have started flyin' where
  The brake-shoes bite the wheels.

There! I've got an empty spotted—
  Wait until she whistles out;
Ditch that glim, the yard bull's hidin'
  Underneath that water spout.

Now she's off. Climb in that pennsy,
  And we're on our way once more;
Let's flop down here in the corner—
  Who's that sleepin' on the floor?

Denver Mike! He's got a bottle—
  Knocked out stiff on old white line;
Spot the grub wrapped in a paper!
  Come on, kid, let's dine.

A HARD ROAD TO RIDE

THE acid test of the hobo's ingenuity comes when he gets on a "horstile" road. An important part of the hobo's information fund is an up-to-date knowledge of the routes and railway division points where he must expect antagonism, either from trainmen, citizens, or railway police. David Kaplan sings the following song about the Kansas City Southern in southern Arkansas and northern Louisiana. Over on the other side of the Mississippi River, the Illinois Central is a comparatively easy road to ride.

"George," he said, "The K.C.S.
Is a damn hard road to ride.
The bulls along that line," he said,
"Are tougher than a speck-bum's hide.

"They killed two 'boes at Shreveport,
And beat them up bad at De Queen,
But where's the fun in riding
If you don't ride roads that's mean?

"So I'm on the blinds of the Flying Crow,
And I'm going to ride her through;

I've slicked the bull at De Queen,
And his partner at Shreveport too.

"There's cool soft nights in them Gulf towns,
And sea-twanged sailors' talk,
And high yaller gals to flirt with
And a ship bound for New York."

THE NEGRO BUM

Among the hoboes the Negro finds something approaching social equality. There is little, if any, discrimination against the dingy 'bo in the jungles. I am indebted to Phillip, bull-fiddle maestro in a New Orleans honkeytonk (The Red Dot), for the following monologue.

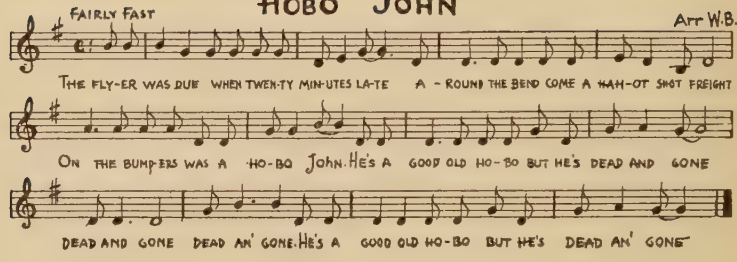
I was goin' down the railroad,
  Hungry and wanted to eat,
I asks a white lady
  For some bread and meat.

She give me bread and coffee,
  And treated me mighty kin';
If I could git them good handouts,
  I'd quit work, bum all time.

Well the railroad completed,
  The cars upon the track,
Yonder come two dirty bos
  With grip-sacks on dey back.

One look like my brother,
  The other my brother-in-law.
They walk all the way from Mississippi
  To the state of Arkansaw.

HOBO JOHN


FAIRLY FAST
Arr W.B.
THE FLY-ER WAS DUE WHEN TWEN-TY MIN-UTES LA-TE A - ROUND THE BEND COME A HAH-OT SHOT FREIGHT
ON THE BUMPERS WAS A HO-BO JOHN. HE'S A GOOD OLD HO-BO BUT HE'S DEAD AND GONE
DEAD AND GONE DEAD AN' GONE. HE'S A GOOD OLD HO-BO BUT HE'S DEAD AN' GONE

HOBO JOHN

THE reference to Jay Gould's daughter in this ballad sets the origin at around 1880.

The flyer was due when, twenty minutes late,
Around the bend came a hot-shot freight.
On the bumpers was a hobo john;
He's a good old hobo, but he's dead and gone,
Dead and gone, dead and gone,
He's a good old hobo, but he's dead and gone.

The old 'bo, he said before he died,
"They's one more route I'd like to ride."
"Tell me, podner, what can that be?"
"It's down in Louisiana on the old I.C.
On the old I.C., on the old I.C.
Down in Louisiana on the old I.C."

Jay Gould's daughter said before she died,
"Pappy, fix the blinds so as the bums can't ride;
If ride they must, let 'em ride the rod,
Let 'em put their trust in the hands of God,
In the hands of God, in the hands of God,
Let 'em put their trust in the hands of God."

THE HOBO KNOWS

A MOTIF of defeat runs through the following lines, written by Henry A. White, a 'bo who grew old on the road. The complete poem, of which these five stanzas are a part, was first printed in the quondam *Hobo News* of St. Louis.

He knows the whirr of the rolling wheels,
And their click on the time-worn joints;
His ear is attuned to the snap and snarl
Of the train, at the rickety points.

He knows the camp by the side of the road,
And the java and mulligan too;
The siding long, and the water tank
Are as home to me and you.

He knows the fright of hunger and thirst,
And of cold and of rain as well;
Of raggedy clothes and out-worn shoes,
An awful tale he can tell.

He knows what it means to slave all day,
And at night eat the vilest of fare;

What a tale he can tell of loathsome bunks,
Cramped quarters, and noisome air.

He knows what the end of it all will be
When he crosses the line at the goal:
A rough pine box, and a pauper's grave
And he has paid his toll.

HOBO MEMORIES

Hobo poems usually bear evidence that some earlier familiar song has furnished a model. In "Hobo Memories" the song "When You and I were Young, Maggie," with perhaps a dash of "Mandalay," seems to have worked a strong influence.

I rambled down to the Big Four tracks, as I did in days of yore;
And I rambled back to Tamaracks as we did ofttimes before.
I thought of my old pardners there, so reckless, bold and brave
Some are in the Big House now, and others in the grave.

Now do you remember the road kid that hung around the camp?
Where you and I, in days gone by, so often scoffed a lump;
But Angeline is horstile now, the truth I will not dodge,
She's got no use for an old time 'bo who cannot pay his lodge.

Now do you remember the road kid that hung around the camp?

He was always good for an order when he met an old
John Tramp.
He is on the police force now, a man of great renown,
He has no use for an old John Bo; he marched me out of
town.

Then I met a bunch of yeggmen all weighted down with
rods;
They were not sure about me, for they talked by signs
and nods.
They tried to make a get-away when the bulls they made
them halt,
And they all got clawed in Gettasford for a mangy bag
of salt.

Well, now farewell to the old Four Tracks, I can no
longer stay.
I will cast my lot with the Eastern boys down on the
B. & A.,
But if ever I return again, together you and me,
Will have a rip-roaring time where the jungles used to
be.

THE HOBO'S WARNING

Hobo bards are seldom imbued with the pollyanna spirit, and, save for the rare intervals when they turn to parody and burlesque, they are apt to sing of things as they are.

This is a tale of the wanderlust trail,
Of a guy with his kick to the wall,
So all you flip yaps ease up on your traps
And take heed to avert your downfall.

Now I'm a wise egg, who can lie, steal or beg,
And I've rambled this whole world around;
I've been East, I've been West, I'm there with the best
When it comes to covering the ground.

I've handled a pick alongside a spick,
Laying steel on the M. K. & T.,
And I've hit the heavy on the New Orleans' levee,
Sailed on an oiler to sea.

I've juggled a tray in a Bowery café,
Hopped bells for a hotel in Chi';
Carried a pack along the B. & O. track,
Glommed red-ball freights on the fly.

All my life I've roamed, without friend or home,
Up and down the old cinder trail,
And now it seems all I have is my dreams
Of days that were spent out of jail.

Now all of you mutts 've heard me throw my guts,
You can see how it's ending for me.
Stay here in the sticks with the rest of the hicks—
That's a hobo's warning from me!

DE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

JIM SEYMOUR, who signed himself "The Hobo Poet," was at one time a habitué of Chicago's Bughouse Square. One of his poems, more revolutionary than the present item, describes the hardships suffered by a hobo "pearl diver." In the following poem Seymour has reproduced with some accuracy the dialect heard on the road.

'Twas de night before Christmas, and out on de pike
Not a rattler was stirrin', de 'boes had t' hike;
De glims in de winders was shinin' and bright,
De yaps was all happy dat clear winter night.

Wid all kinds o' good t'ings a-stuffin' deir gills,
Dey boddered der nuts not a bit wit' our ills;
W'ile out on de Pennsy, from skypiece t' shank,
De 'boes was all freezin', wit' no Christ to t'ank.

Not a t'ing we'd been chewin' de whole livin' day,
Not a sign of a handout had moseyed our way,
But de cold, chillin' breezes was buttin' in right
And handin' us plenty o' shivers dat night.

Poor Slim and Canary and Idaho Dick
Wid breadbaskets empty was feelin' some sick,
And poor little W'eezy, from down Hampshire way
Wid bowed head was settin', wid nuttin' to say.

De bunch sure was grumpy and kickin' deir luck,
And t'inkin' o' Chris'mas widout any chuck;
And t'inkin' o' geezers—just bums like our selves—
Wid heat in deir hangouts and grub on deir shelves.

We t'ought o' de Willies a-pullin' de cork
And guzzlin' de bubbly down East in New York;
Dey owned all dese rattlers dat us guys had built,
Dey gets all de rakeoff, and we gits de jilt.

And w'ile we was t'inkin' de minutes skidooed
And poor little W'eezy kep' on wid his brood;
De wind kep' a howlin' hell bent down de road,
And wid everyone some colder it growed.

We noticed dat W'eezy was shiverin' some more,
De wind w'istlin' t'rough de ol' benny he wore;
At last he looked up and he says to us geeks,
"I t'ink dat it's time dat youse mugs beat yer sneaks."

We ast him what ailed him. He says, "Nuttin' a-tall,
Except dat I feel dat I've made me last stall.
De nex' train dat stops at dis ol' watertank
Is goin' to take care o' dis good-fer-nix Yank.

"De rattler I'm meanin' 'll scoop up de bunch
'And pack yoose all if yoose don't git a hunch;
De bloke in de cab's got a scythe on his knee,
De plate on de tooter it reads '23.'"

We seen how it was, an' we says, "Ain't no use
In talking dat way. Yoose got no excuse
For gettin' cold feet and goin' down in a flunk,"
And den we fixed up poor W'eezy a bunk.

We made 'im flop out on a piece of plank
We'd propped up against de side o' de ol' watertank;
We says, "In de mornin' we'll git lots o' chuck—
It's Christmas and God'll not see us git stuck."

Den W'eezy says, "Fellers, de man o' de rod
Has lost all his fait' in bot' Christmas and God;
He's handed a lump just as nice as you please
But to chaw it he sets down on de doorstep to freeze."

Wid dat he stopped talkin' and shut his trap tight;
De way he was w'eezing, it sure was a fright,
We covered him over wid all dat we had,
But spite of dat, he was all to de bad.

We gaddered around him to keep up his cheer—
He w'ispered, "Hark, fellers, her w'istle I hear."
Den, shovin' his mitt 'neat' his benny he died—
And poor little W'eezy was on his last ride.

ME AND MY BINDLE

Not unlike "The Dealer Gets It All," also included in this collection, this recital describes an adventure which no veteran of the road would consider novel. A bum from Buffalo, New York, who was kodaking as he went, spoke it with appropriate gestures.

I was plingin' down the main stem with a bindle in my hand,
When some reubens jumped out on me like a wild Indian band.
They socked me in the trap and they lammed me in the slats
And they sloughed me on the backbone with a dozen leaded bats.

They shook me down for slum-junk, they searched me for booze,
And chased me down the main drag till I wore out both my shoes.
When they finally caught me they put me on a rail,
And they tossed me and my bindle in their yaptown country jail.

Next day the justice he was hooty,—and his clerk he
wrote it down,
"Take this hobo and his bindle and run him out of
town."
But I was weak and blowsy and my head roared like a
horn,
So I slipped down to a scatter to lap up a shot of corn.

And 'twas there I met Toledo Slim there a-makin' his
last stand,
And I saw him pull the trigger with my bindle in my
hand.
Then I swore by all that's holy that my bummin' days
was through
When standing there before me was the Podunk rub-
berglue.

He poked me with his billy, he punched me in the
mouth,
Then he kicked me on the north end when I was goin'
south.
But I made a doozy side-step, and caught him on the
snout,
And he went to sleep a-singin', "And then the Light
Went Out!"

Just then a mighty rattler came puffin' 'round the bend,
And I hooked her in the bowels, a doozy welcome friend!
For I'd learned a happy lesson in hostile hoosier land,
And no more I'll pipe the main stem with a bindle in my hand.

ONE DAY—SOME WAY

ONE of the most prolific of all hobo poets was Bill Quirke, an international tramp. He went to the Mediterranean for the winter on a cattle boat, and he shuttled back and forth across the continent working at odd jobs. Quirke was a steady contributor to the *Hobo News,* and in December, 1921, that paper carried an account of his death in California. Ironically he was crushed to death beneath an automobile, a mode of transportation he had always avoided.

Once when I was young like you,—
The days when all the West was new,—
That time, to me, my hand looked strong,
I thought I had the world at my call.
But times got hard; my pard went wrong;
The bank it bust, I lost it all;
'Twas easy come and go those days,
I'd never fail to make a raise.
But those old days are past and done—
My game was clean, I never won.

For years I've drilled a rough pathway
And weathered many a wintry blast.

I'll make another stake some day,
For luck must turn my way at last.
I'm far too old for workin', too—
They say my work is almost through;
My ore assesses never a flake,
But still I hope to make a stake.

Far down the gloomy cañoned wall,
A glowing headlight pierced the night;
A lone owl in the spruces tall,
"Hoot-hoot," flung from the height.
We caught that rattler for the west
As Joe lived o'er his life again,
And talked the way of hardbit men
Of home, no weight of years could break,
"I know one day, some way, I'll make a stake."

THE ROAD KID'S SONG

At the tramp gathering the entertaining is sometimes left to the road kids, or apprentice tramps. Every well-trained road kid has a wide repertory of ballads. In the jungle camp he is not permitted to speak until spoken to, but when the jocker signs him to do so, he begins his song. The following is a typical road kid song.

Oh, when I was a little boy
I started for the West—
  I hadn't got no farther than Cheyenne
When I met a husky burly
Taking of his rest,
  And he flagged me with a big lump and a can.

When I saw that can of coffee,
How it made me think of home!
    "Won't you let me have some,"
    Said I, "Good Mr. Bum?
Remember you was once a kid yourself."

He asked me how old I was,
  I told him just fourteen,
That Muncie was where I come from.

In his eyes appeared a stare,
"I think you I will snare,
For you ought to have the makings of a bum."

He asked me could I steal,
And when I told him no,
I could see that it was doozy by his looks,
He said the kids he had befo'
Were all in stir for thinking they was hooks.

THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS

Bill Quirke answered fully the definition of a hobo. He was no exception in that he was literate, and some of his short stories and poems, most of which reached print in the *Hobo News,* furnished excellent descriptions of the vagrant life. A short time before his death he wrote to that unique periodical in a letter dated "Seattle, May 10, 1921":

> . . . I may be here for some time. I was helping my partner on a small whitewash job and the scaffold broke down and I twisted my forehead, broke my nose, fractured my arm and the joint of my right elbow and the hospital doctors tell me I can't use my hand for three months, and on account of the fractured joint, I'll never have full use of it again, but outside of that I'm all O. K.

Quirke was thoroughly familiar with all the jobs that the migratory worker falls heir to, and he lists some of them in the following poem:

I don't mind working to earn my bread,
  And I'd just as soon keep straight;

I've listened to what the preacher said
  About rams and sheep at the gate.
I like to sleep on an easy bed,
  But I'll tell you this, old mate:

A man like me that you call a 'bo
  Can blister and sweat and save
All his life and earn just enough dough
  To prove that he is a slave,
And have, when it comes his time to go,
  Well, enough to line his grave.

Say, mate, have you ever seen the mills
  Where the kids at the looms spit blood?
Have you been in the mines when the fire damp blew,
Have you shipped as a hand with a freighter's crew,
  Or worked in a levee flood?

Have you rotted wet in a grading camp
  Or scorched in a desert line?
Or done your night stunt with your lamp,
Watching the timbers drip with damp
  And hearing the oil rig whine?

Have you had your pay held back for tools
  That you never saw or could use?
Have you gone like a fool with the other fools
To the bosses' saloon where the strong arm rules
  And cashed your time for booze?

Well, those are the games; I've played 'em all
  That a man like me can play;
And this lovely world is a hard old ball,
And so at last I took a fall
  To the right an' proper way.

I do no kicking at God or Fate—
  I keep my shoes for the road—
The long gray road, and I love it, mate—
Hay-foot, straw-foot—that's my gait,
  And I carry no other man's load.

I don't mind working to earn my bread,
  And I'd just as soon keep straight,
But according to what the preacher said
  I'm a ram, and I've missed the gate.
But I'm joggin' along and joggin' ahead,
  And perhaps I'll find it, mate.

THE SONG OF THE WHEELS

EVEN the most prosaic plush rider may note the peculiar musical quality of the sound made by car trucks clicking over rail joints. At times this sound can be maddening—particularly when a box-car wheel develops a "flat." The smallest defect in a car wheel is soon worn flat by the rapid revolutions, and the *bump-bump-bumpety-bump* made by the "flat" is unbearable. One warm winter night, however, the wheels were turning merrily on a string of empties coming out of Baton Rouge on the I. C., and a voice in the dark corner of a refrigerator car chanted this wistful litany.

Alah-gazam! Clickety-click!
This is the song of the wheels.
Alah-gazam! Clickety-click!
Do you know how a hobo feels
Alah-gazam! Clickety-click!
When the telegraph poles rush by
Alah-gazam! Clickety-click!
And the stars that gleam in the sky
Alah-gazam! Clickety-click!
Are one blurred streak of light,
Alah-gazam! Clickety-click!

Making pale the night?
Alah-gazam! Clickety-click!
A lullaby soothing and deep
And an *alah-gazam* and *clickety-click*
Putting us all to sleep—
We feel like lords of the vaulted blue
Like kings of the wind-swept skies,
With never a thought for the morrow to come.—
Apart from alien eyes,
Sprawled at our ease on the baggage blind,
We dream of a home somewhere.
We dream of a life of idyllic peace
Free from all toil and care;
We dream of dinners of steak and pie
Three times a day or more—
Of claret bubbling and dago red,
Of cigars by the score—
Of warm baths and featherbed,
And carpets on the floor!

Alah-gazam! Clickety-click!
Life's a series of dirty deals—
Alah-gazam! Clickety-click!
This is the song of the wheels!

TIE-PASS

THIS work-song, fragmentary though it is, is a fine specimen of hobo lore. It has an insinuating rhythm and is probably a black sheep cousin to the section hands' favourite, "Jerry, Go Ile That Car."

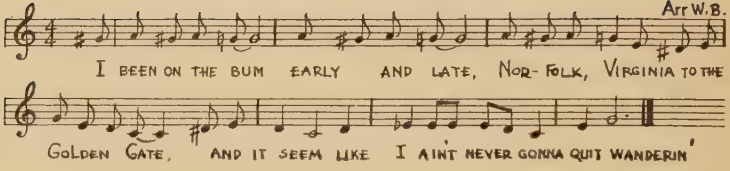
Section boss is Slewfoot Bill—
You swings your shovel and you works with a will.
If you spit on your hands or stop to swear,
It's, "You damn bum, git to workin' there!"

It was Lord Scut come moochin' by,
Hole in his hat and a hokus eye;
Clothesline belt and pants too small,
Skatin' on his uppers from spring to fall.

I seen the creek and the jungle smoke;
I leaned on my shovel till the handle broke.
Clay on the feathers and clay on the shuck,
Down tools and I follow my luck.

THE WANDERER'S BLUES

Arr W.B.



THE WANDERER'S BLUES

THIS title is purely arbitrary. Herschal, the dinge who sang the song, called it "The Hesitation Blues," and, except for the refrain, he sang it to that tune. He sang about fifty verses, many of which were unprintable. The wistful refrain, however, recurred at the end of each stanza.

I been on the bum
Early and late—
Norfolk, Virginia
To the Golden Gate,
And it seem like
I ain't never gonna quit wanderin'.

If you wanna ride easy,
But no so very fas',
Get you a rubber-tire buggy
And a pacin' jack-ass,
And it seem like
I ain't never gonna quit wanderin'.

My pappy was a foreman,
My brother drives a hack,

The baby take up tickets
While sister bawls the jack,
And it seem like
I ain't never gonna quit wanderin'.

June bug come in April,
Lightnin' bug in May;
Bed bug come at midnight
And stays 'til the break o' day,
And it seem like
I ain't never gonna quit wanderin'.

Sittin' in the jailhouse
With my feet to the wall,
Mule headed woman was
The cause of it all,
And it seem like
I ain't never gonna quit wanderin'.

Ashes to ashes,
Dust to dust,
If it wasn't for my vest
My belly would bust,
And it seem like
I ain't never gonna quit wanderin'.

Honey, tell me how long
Befo' we eat—

I got a coaster-brake bottom
And ball-bearin' feet,
And it looks like
I ain't never gonna quit wanderin'.

O, walkin' down the right o' way,
And a-pipin' the stem—
All I got to show for it
Is the muscle in my limb,
And it looks like
I ain't never gonna quit wanderin'.

THE WANDERING LABORER'S SONG

THERE is no region in America more beautiful than that of the Ouchita Moutains, south of Mena, Arkansas. There it is that Commonwealth College, an unusual experiment in education, is conducted, and there it is that more than one hobo has found haven. One fall, on my way south to New Orleans, I stopped off at the Commonwealth colony, and the place was so congenial I stayed on for two months. I paid for my keep by helping Baldo, an Italian coal miner, build a huge, native-stone fireplace for the school library. Several items were added to my song collection at the time of that visit, and later W. E. Zeuch, director of the school, sent me some songs from the repertory of David Kaplan. The following is one of Kaplan's ballads.

It was up on the Moffat Tunnel,
  In Colorado's snowy clime,
Two buddies while working together
  Quarreled over a jug of wine.

One with remorse is bitten
  And below on the rocks lies dead;
The other above lies groaning,
  A pick buried in his head.

Chorus:
I love my pick and shovel,
I'll paint its handles red,
For without my pick and shovel
I couldn't earn my bread.

It was on the Denver-Salt Lake Line,
A Mexican section gang
Met a light engine in a tunnel,
And the grave made loud harangue.

Arms and feet lay thrown about,
And spattered blood around,
And Death, in its grimness grinning,
Lay stark upon the ground.

It's pay day around Mount Shasta,
And the prostitutes are gay,
For they're coming down with their gambling pimps
To take our checks away.

You'll be in despair when you wake,
Tomorrow in the morn,
But few days of labor left
And your winter's stake all gone.

Refrain:

I love my pick and shovel,
I'll paint its handles red
For without my pick and shovel
I couldn't earn my bread.

GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY *

Alkee, to get drunk.
Balloon, a bindle.
Banjo, a short-handled shovel.
Banner, carrying the, to walk the streets all night.
Batter privates, to beg from dwelling houses.
Beanery, a restaurant.
Beef, to complain.
Billy, a bat.
Bindle, a roll of bedding carried by some hoboes, either for comfort's sake, or as a plea against vagrancy charges. From bundle.
Blackjack, a cylindrical leather bag filled with lead shot.
Blinds, the space left vacant when the telescope end of a baggage car is connected with the locomotive tender. Ordinarily this space would provide half the passageway between two coaches, but the locomotive tender is flush. Hence, blind end, or blinds.
Boomer, temporary.
Broad, a girl. A prostitute.
Budge, the front pocket.
Bumpers, the ledges to which coupling pins are attached. Riding space between freight cars.
Can, a jail. An improvised coffee pot.
Chronika, a criminal tramp; a two- or three-time loser.
Cinder grifters, hoboes.
Con, a train conductor.
Croaked gumps, killed chickens.
Crum, a louse. *Crummy,* lousy.

* This listing includes only the hobo terms used in this book. It is by no means a complete vocabulary.

Crushed the can, broke jail.
Dago red, a cheap red wine.
Dead one, a retired hobo.
Deck, to board a train. Also, the gunnels.
Dingbat, the lowest type of tramp, as opposed to the aristocrats of the hobo world, the comet and passenger stiff. Also stew-bum, speck-bum, greasetail, ringtail, fuzzytail.
Dinge, a Negro tramp.
Ditch, to throw off a train. Also to dispose of something.
Doozy, grand, gorgeous, dear, valuable.
Double-decked stock, a stock car built with two floors for hauling sheep.
Drag, a street.
Flag, to hail, to halt a passer-by.
Flip, to board a train in motion.
Floater, a discharge from police court. Also, a hobo.
Flop, to sleep. Also short for flophouse and flopjoint.
Flopjoint, a place where a bed may be hired for a small sum.
Fly, to catch on the, to board a train in motion.
Frisk, to search.
Fritz, on the, in bad condition.
Gandy-dancer, a steel rail worker.
Gay cat, a hobo tenderfoot.
Ghost story, any fanciful tale. See introductory note to "The Big Rock Candy Mountains."
Glim, a match, a light.
Glom, to catch, hang on, strike.
Goabouts, tramps.
Growler, a can of beer.
Gump, a chicken.
Gunnels, the steel struts beneath a box-car.
Gunsil, a boy tramp, usually travelling alone. Also, *punk.*

Guts, the bracing rods under a box-car; also courage, fortitude.
Guts, to throw the, to talk too much.
Ham, to walk across country. From the traditional ham actor whose company gets stranded on the road, and who is forced to walk back to the city.
Handout, food handed out the kitchen door, as distinguished from a *sit down,* when the bum is asked inside. Also, pokeout.
Harness bull, a uniformed policeman.
Harvest stiff, a migratory worker in the wheat fields.
Highball, the signal to start the train. Also, to move rapidly.
Hijacker, a tramp who holds up hoboes.
Hinkydinks, a once famous flophouse in Chicago.
Hit the grit, to jump off a moving train.
Hog, on the, in a bad way financially.
Homeguards, men who lead settled lives.
Hoosiers, farmers and villagers.
Hooty, angry.
Horstile, any vicinity unfavourable to hoboes.
Hot shot, a fast freight.
Hustlebuggy, a police patrol.
Jack, money.
Java, coffee.
Jitney, a five-cent piece.
Jocker, a tramp who has one or more boys to do his begging for him.
John, a hobo.
Jungle, any hobo encampment. Usually in the open country, near railroad, shade, running water and fuel, but sometimes in vacant building.
Kick, the hip pocket, the backside.
Kicks, shoes.
Knowledge box, a country schoolhouse.

Lay-out, an outfit for cooking and smoking opium.
Line, the underworld.
Lump, a parcel of food, a sum of money realized by begging.
Manifest, a through, or redball freight, as opposed to a way freight that stops at small towns.
Monika, a name, specifically, a descriptive one assumed by a hobo. See Monika Songs.
Mongee, food.
Mooch, to beg. Also, to walk along.
Mule, raw, white whiskey, so called from the kick it gives.
Mulligan, a kind of stew made with water, seasoning, potatoes, onions, any available vegetable and a piece of meat if it is to be had.
Mush fake, to mend umbrellas, a trade learned in penal institutions.
Mush faker, a hobo umbrella mender.
Mush talk, flattery.
Obie, a country postoffice.
Packing the banner, walking the streets.
Panhandling, begging on the street.
Pearl diver, a restaurant dishwasher.
Pennsy, a coal car. A gondola.
Pipe, to mooch or beg, as in *piping the stem.*
Pill-roller, a physician.
Plinging, walking at a rapid gait.
Pogies, workhouses.
Pokeout, a handout.
Pork, on the, same as *on the hog.*
Plush, the seats in a passenger coach.
Punk, a boy who travels with a jocker. Also bread. Also denotes inferior quality.
Preshun, a punk.
"Q"—The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad.

Rare, a drink.
Rattler, a freight train.
Reefer, a refrigerator car.
Reuben, an inhabitant of a small town, a farmer.
Red ball, a fast freight.
Rods, a single iron rod between the cross-section and the axle of the oblong four-wheel truck of passenger coaches, where some passenger stiffs ride. See Preface.
Rubberglue, a plainclothes man; derived from gum-shoe.
Sap, a policeman's stick.
Scatter, a speak-easy.
Scabs, non-union workers. Hoboes who are not wobblies.
Scoffing, eating.
Shack, a train brakeman.
Shark, an employment agent.
Shive, a razor.
Skating on the uppers, dead broke; literally, walking on shoes worn through to the uppers.
Slave market, an employment agency, or the section of a city in which employment agencies are centered.
Slough, to strike, shove, or handle roughly. (Rhymes with "now.")
Snipe, a discarded cigarette or cigar butt; a slightly used chewing tobacco quid. *Shooting snipes,* salvaging such tobacco for future use.
Snowball, morphine.
Speck bum, a stew-bum, an old floater.
Stem, the city street, sometimes the railroad.
Stew-bum, a broken-down hobo.
Stiff, a man, specifically, a hobo. Usually qualified, as in harvest stiff, working stiff, passenger stiff, alkee stiff, rummy stiff.
Sugan, a bindle, a bed comforter.

Throw, to spend freely.
Throw the guts, to talk too much. To talk freely.
Timber-beast, a lumber worker, a woodsman.
Tooting ringers, ringing doorbells of dwelling houses.
Tops, the tops of railroad cars.
Town clown, the village policeman.
Tramp, a vagrant who lives by begging and never works.
Trap, the mouth.
Tule, a large bulrush growing abundantly along streams in the Southwest.
Turkey, a canvas bag for carrying clothes.
Vag, "without visible means of support"; the police court charge of vagrancy.
Whiteline, white corn whiskey.
Wingey, a one-armed man.
Wob, Wobbly, a member of the International Workers of the World, an organization for migratory workers. The name is said to have originated with a Chinese restaurant-owner's attempts to pronounce the initial letters, I. W. W.
Yap, a farmer, a hobo tenderfoot.
Yegg, Yeggman, criminal tramps who blow safes in small towns.

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